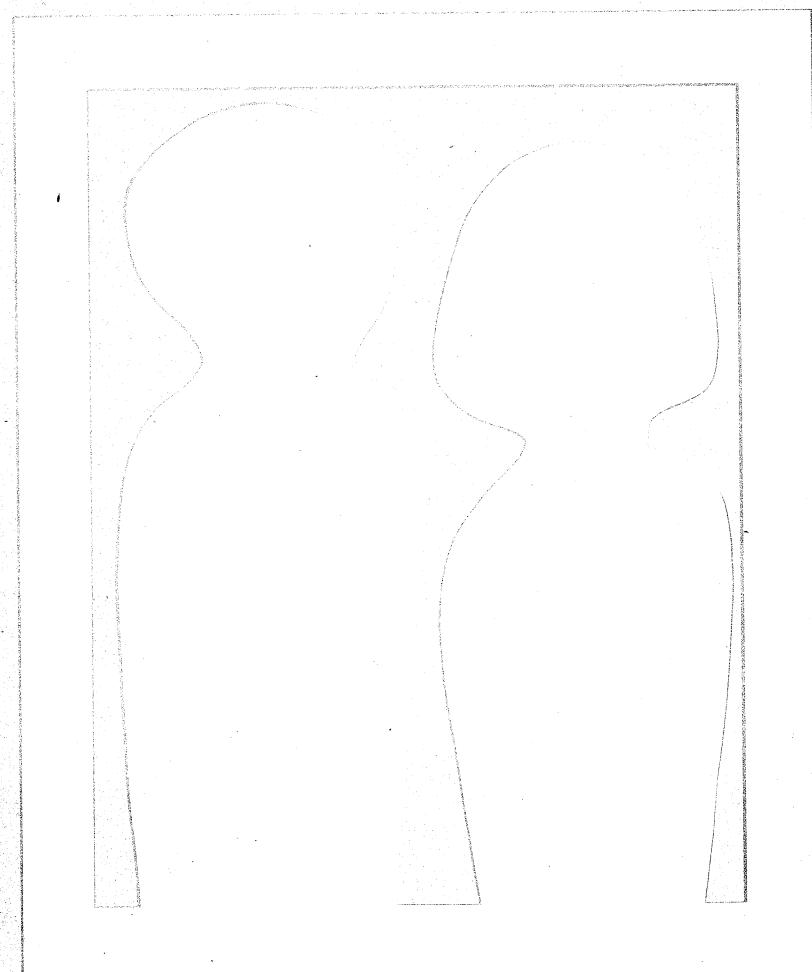




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# MARRIED LOVE

*A Modern Christian View of Marriage and Family Life*



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# **MARRIED LOVE**

*A Modern Christian View of Marriage and Family Life*

BERNARD HARING, C.Ss.R.



Peacock Books  
Argus Communications  
Chicago, 60657

## Contents

Foreword .....	5
Marriage and the Council .....	9
Love in Marriage .....	19
A Sacred Partnership .....	25
Married Love and the Sacraments .....	31
Affection and Continence .....	37
Ideal and Reality .....	47
Permanence and Change in Values .....	53
Responsible Parenthood .....	61
How Many Children? .....	75
Sacramental Education .....	83
Our Divorced Brothers and Sisters .....	89
Mixed Marriages .....	99
Widows and Widowers .....	115
Destiny Can Be Shaped .....	121

## *Foreword*

**I**N ALL AGES, all religions, and all cultures, marriage and family have been honored as a sacred reality. They manifest one of the most vital forms of the love and worship we owe to God. From them, the best human traditions emerge and life flows. However far matrimonial and family life may sometimes be from the ideal, this ideal has remained, and always will remain, the basis and pattern of hope for all those who are searching for a vital union between religion and life.

In divine revelation, particularly in the New Testament, the ideal of marriage received its most attractive expression: marriage reflects those characteristics which best reveal man and woman as image of God who is Love. Life, so closely shared in marriage and family, is a part of the total calling to find one's own true self and uniqueness. This uniqueness is found in the love and service one receives and gives to the other, in a love that expresses respect for the dignity and personality of the other, in a union of spirit and harmony of wills, in gratitude and receptivity, spontaneity and creativity.

Marriage is instituted by God to lead man to a more vital understanding of that wonderful bond He wished to establish, in the fulness of time, between Christ, his only Son made man, and all mankind. The saving mission of marriage should be more clearly and fully realized in the light of the Covenant between Christ and His Church.

Christians see in marriage not only a sacred sign and symbol but also a source of wholeness and salvation. For believers it is a sublime vocation. They feel themselves called to share together the experience of mutual, intimate, intense and generous love which can give them an increasingly real foretaste of an infinitely greater reality: If the mere reflection of divine love has so much grandeur and joy, what must be the magnificence of the everlasting bond of friendship with the One who is Love! What must be the happiness that flows from His love!

Christian couples have a vocation to be witnesses of that love which the Lord revealed to the world by gathering His friends around Himself, and by His Dying and His rising up to life again. Before a

skeptical world, Christian couples proclaim in their very life their belief in God who is Love and Life. For this inconstant world, Christian marriage is a dynamic sign that conveys to everyone the message that God is Faithfulness, and that through the faithfulness of His sons and daughters He will bring things to completion. In face of corrupt and false love, Christian married people are witnesses to the mystery of that love which bears fruit plentifully by the joys and sacrifices of their vocation.

In this book I have tried to give a picture of these high ideals and also to express my firm conviction that people in the most difficult situations with their limited energies can trust in God's graciousness, if they seek the next possible step in this direction.

Parts of this book were previously published in *Frau und Mutter*, and in *Marriage*, and combined in my German work *Der Christ in der Ehe*, parts were spoken over German radio stations. However this present book is not a mere translation. Each chapter has been thoroughly rewritten and several new chapters have been added in view of the newer development of the vision of the Church. Into my own thought came some more wholesome disquiet.

I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Josephine Ryan, who graciously helped me put the material together and edited it. I want to express my gratitude to Miss Diana Augsburger who read the manuscript from the viewpoint of her own Protestant tradition and with the mind of a youthful person.

*Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R.  
September 1969*

#### MARRIED LOVE

By Rev. Bernard Häring, C.Ss.R.

A Modern Christian View of Marriage  
and Family Life

## *Marriage and the Council*

*"For God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace, and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole."*

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 48.

MANY PEOPLE expected Vatican Council II to offer concrete answers to the specific moral problems of married Christians; to say what is permitted in married life and what is forbidden under penalty of venial or mortal sin. Some were disappointed when these ready-made answers were not forthcoming.

There was no need for disappointment. The mission and the difficulties of married couples were very much on the minds of the Council Fathers and their theologians. This deeply-felt concern resulted in an extremely sensitive approach to the subject of marriage and to all those matters that affect decisions of conscience in the vocation of marriage today.

Each Council has a character, a spirit of its own. The spirit of Vatican II was one of urgent desire for communication and coopera-

tion with the world of today. It was a "pastoral" Council, aware of the tremendous changes that have come about in conditions of living in this scientific age and of the new knowledge, especially in the social and behavioral sciences, which has given us a deeper understanding of relationships in marriage and, indeed, a better grasp of the whole meaning of marriage within the history of salvation.

The attitude of the Council on marriage is marked by the same liberating spirit that characterizes all the Council deliberations; it is an attitude shown by what is specifically said about marriage and — just as important — by what is specifically not said. (The importance of the latter is especially evident in the contrast between the texts finally adopted by the Council and the original outline dealing with "marriage and chastity" submitted by the preparatory doctrinal commission, in which there was a scrupulously complete list of all the sins which can be committed within marriage!)

It was appropriate, first of all, for the Council's main treatment of marriage to appear in the *Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World*. Marriage problems are overwhelmingly of pastoral concern, and it was especially in this Constitution that the Council Fathers showed their keen awareness that many of these problems present themselves today in an entirely new way. The bishops were concerned particularly with the importance of conjugal love and of intimate and harmonious family life, and emphasized the need for responsibility in parenthood under the conditions brought about by modern social development. They recognized also the interdependence of family and society, as well as the effects of this relationship on morality.

In other constitutions, too, the Council's attitude is shown toward various aspects of the sacrament and vocation of marriage in our time.

#### MARRIAGE AND THE LITURGY

In the *Constitution on the Liturgy*, the Council views marriage primarily as a sacrament which brings salvation as an effective sign of the love of Christ, an expression of praise to our Creator and Redeemer, and as a shared path leading to holiness.

The liturgical renewal has already led to a revision of the marriage ceremony, which must become a still richer and stronger manifestation of the grace and mission expressed in the sacrament. Normally the sacrament should be performed during Mass, but in many cases the reading of the Gospel precedes the marriage ceremony, since it is only in the joy of the Gospel message and through faith in God's grace that Christian married couples can recognize and carry out their mission through all the circumstances of everyday life.

The marriage blessing itself, of course, must never be omitted from the ceremony. This blessing, formerly given to the wife as a blessing for fertility, now includes the husband and is a blessing not only for fertility but for the continuation and growth of their conjugal love which should enrich all of their years together. These liturgical rules safeguard the spiritual meaning in the celebration of the marriage covenant.

*The Constitution on the Liturgy* particularly stresses the need to view all the sacraments in the light of the Easter mystery celebrated in the Eucharist. In everything connected with marriage this outlook is most important. If the true center of life and love is disregarded and we attempt, by a casuistry based on mere natural laws and biology, to resolve the difficulties inherent in marriage, disaster eventually follows. This vocation can find its fulfillment in the context of daily life only through the mystery of the love and self-giving of our Lord in his life, death and resurrection. This is the guiding grace of married couples and must be understood by them as their ideal.

If a marriage is to remain holy, or is to become so, it is essential that it retain the original meaning of this state in life. From the very beginning marriage has been a vocation in which life and religion find their unity. It is an act of praise, a receiving of the redemptive and sanctifying powers of Christ in a spirit of praise, and a reciprocal gift given in the same spirit. Christian couples, living for the greater glory of God, will direct their attention to these aspects of marriage throughout their entire life together. Since God is love he will be praised by the very love of the spouses for each other and for their children.

*In the Council's interpretation of the Church, the central idea is the mystery of Christ and His love for the whole human family.*

This is one of the themes dear to St. Paul. In his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, (5:19-21), he applies it to Christian life in general but in special way to conjugal love and the family life that flows from it "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

The liturgical revival promoted by the Council enables Christian married couples to see in the sacraments everything that their vocation implies for them, both as marriage partners and as parents.

As parents they are "the first heralds of the faith" (*Constitution on the Church*, Art. 11) who pass on to their children, through prayer and example, the attitude of *giving* inspired by the message of the sacraments. In their own personal way they share in the prophetic and priestly ministry of Christ the redeemer, for it is through married and family life that "Christianity pervades a whole way of life and even increasingly transforms it. . . . In such a home, husband and wife find their proper vocation in being witnesses, to one another and to their children, of faith in Christ and love for Him. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come" (*Constitution on the Church*, Art. 35).

The family is the basic community of love. Its salvation is one and indivisible: all its members are together on the road of salvation and wholeness. Its life draws constant restorative strength from community prayer and praise and gratitude to the Lord. Through these it discovers the deeper meaning of the sacrifices of family life so necessary to a fruitful living.

Ultimately the family members will bring their affection and the shared existence into harmony with the love and praise which Christ gave to the Father, and will accept in this spirit the trials, the sufferings, the renunciations which circumstances and, finally, their love will impose upon them. Since Christ gave the best he had, since "He has given himself for us" (Eph. 5:2), married couples and their children will strive for that genuine, self-giving love that blesses family life with a unifying warmth and joy.

## MARRIAGE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

From the text of the *Constitution on the Church* we gain a greater insight into marriage as a sacrament which, by its grace and by a life adapted to this grace, reflects the mystical love that binds Christ and His Church in faithful and fruitful union. This concept should result in a more profound understanding of the Church as well as of conjugal and family life.

In the Council's interpretation of the Church, the central idea is the mystery of Christ and His love for the whole human family. This interpretation follows the texts of Scripture and the tradition of twenty centuries of Church history. Only in the wholeness of this concept can either Christian marriage or the Church itself be understood.

"The Church," spouse of Christ and loved by Him unto death, is not something apart from ourselves. It is not a building, or merely a structured institution, or a "holy mother", or a group of hierarchically ordered legislators. The Church is we ourselves joined in community, with all our weaknesses, imperfections, and limitations, but also with our human love for Him who has chosen us as the object of His divine, totally self-giving love. Any narrow notion of the Church, any concept that limits itself to structure or to law, or to that which gives the law priority, creates a false impression of "the Church" as a soulless center of authority rather than as the people of God loving and being loved by Christ.

Too often, in connection with the morality of married life, disembodied words have been used, such as "the rights and duties of the marriage partners," as if the juridical or legal element were the most important one in marriage and in the institutional Church. Such an approach gave rise to the erroneous impression that conjugal love is not part of the essence of the "contract" of marriage. By putting marriage in an artificial, impersonal perspective and regarding love as something abstract, this approach became a dominant element even in relationships between husbands and wives. Not only were the narrow limitations of canon law applied arbitrarily and considered as the most important teachings of the Church, but the true meaning of mutual

help and conjugal love was distorted. Intimate married life was regarded as an expression of sexual desire alone or as no more than a remedy for sexual desire.

The Church knows that she owes all her spiritual wealth to Christ, that she can only grow and develop to the extent that she gives to Him all the love she is able to give, and to extent that she creates, with Christ and in Him, a communion of love. The beauty of the Church, her fertility, her power of attraction, and her missionary dynamism depend mainly on the love her members have for one another in witness to their love for Christ.

The Council applies this outlook to the relationship between conjugal affection and fruitfulness. "A conjugal love which is genuine and well understood, and the whole structure of family life that develops out of it, has a favorable influence on all the other aims of marriage, making the marriage partners available for courageous participation in the love of the Creator and of the Savior who, through them, is constantly wishing to enlarge and enrich his own family" (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Art. 50).

Since the love referred to is a truly *conjugal* one, it follows that wherever conjugal intimacy is interrupted, faithfulness is in danger and the welfare of the children is compromised, since the education of the children and the courage to accept other children later on may become threatened" (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Art. 51). It is this true, strong, tender love, this exuberant personal love between married couples, that can guarantee better than anything else a satisfactory fertility: one that is judicious and capable of fulfilling a truly Christian educational function.

The primacy of love does not, however, in the eyes of the Church, obscure or make superfluous the moral effort needed in marriage. The Church itself, as "God's people on the march," knows that it must always strive for greater purity and deeper devotion in order to make new progress. Married couples feel the same need. Like the Church united with Christ, in their own union they must undergo a continual conversion to goodness. Thus it is love that gives the moral law its ultimate meaning and its true basis.

The law's function is to protect from human frailty both the communion of marital love and those environmental conditions that help to nourish it. The mission of marriage demands of us, above all, that we work out a set of ethical rules or a definition of duties, based on the needs of this holy union on the one hand and, on the other, an adequate appreciation of the actual conditions of life.

#### THE FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD

The Church is aware of having been sent into the world for the sake of the world, as a part of the design of the Savior's love. It knows that, as the then-Cardinal Montini put it, "in seeking the world, it should discover itself."

In this spirit the Second Vatican Council studied in depth the reciprocal relationships between the family and its environment, taking into consideration the ever-changing secular conditions that affect the family, as well as the ways in which the family itself can and should influence those conditions.

This means, above all, that the presence of the Christian family in our modern culture, in a given society, must have a missionary aspect. It means, moreover, that the family must not permit itself to be harmed by its surroundings, and that the married couple and their children should shoulder all the responsibilities which their own welfare and that of others impose upon them.

The realization of the ideals of marriage and family and, indeed, of life generally, brings Catholics into sharp conflict with a materialistic world. They should give a certain character to the society in which they live: by promoting justice and goodwill towards others in their social contacts, by sharing in community and civic affairs, by taking an interest in legislation on all levels of government, and by working in international organizations. Through such efforts a society's attitudes and goals are improved, and the Christian ideals of marriage and family life, as well as the economic and social patterns that sustain them, are made of more effect in the world.

The Council further recognizes the necessity of "distinguishing eternal realities from their changing expressions" (*Constitution on the*

*Church in the Modern World*, Art. 52) so that provision may be made for the needs and interests of the family which new times require.

If married Christians want their witness to be accepted in today's world, they must avoid confusion between mere encrusted customs of thought or behavior and basic, unchangeable truths. Faithfulness to the "signs of the times" may often require removal of the encrustations in order to reveal better the genuine deposit of truth. This differentiation between the temporary and the permanent, between the extrinsic and the intrinsic, is especially necessary in our age of profound social, cultural, scientific, and technical change. Unless that which truly belongs to revelation is rescued from the mass of formulas designed for mentalities and social structures that no longer exist, our contemporaries will be led to reject the whole deposit as a museum piece deserving only a shrug of the shoulders.

Throughout their deliberations it was clear that the Council Fathers had great pastoral concern for the almost insurmountable problems of conscience encountered by many couples today by reason of the limitations imposed by urban living and a radically changed economy. They were profoundly conscious of the importance of healthy relationships in marriage and parenthood, and the need to harmonize the demands of conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life under present living conditions.

The ethics of Catholic marriage result from an alliance of courageous realism in faith with an equally courageous realism concerning man's time and place in history. With this in mind, the Second Vatican Council chose the affirmative approach of helping Christian couples to see more clearly the sanctifying and creative roles of their conjugal love, not only in their marriage and in their parental vocation but also in their mission to make Christ's love manifest in the modern world.

## *Love in Marriage*

*“The very nature of marriage as an unbreakable covenant between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a right-ordered manner.”*

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 50.

HOW MANY TIMES have we heard preachers inveighing against the reluctance of couples to have children and against any reasonable regulation of births? “Children are the primary purpose of marriage; love is a secondary consideration.” But towering above all else in the world is that sublime truth that both gladdens and obligates us: “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Only in the light of this truth does creation shine forth in its fullest splendor. And when Paul, too, proclaims, “But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13), it is difficult to see why this primacy of love should not apply also to marriage, and in a very special way.

At least in Western culture, men and women fall in love before marriage and meet earnestly the question: “are we able to reciprocate genuine, faithful love?” This is the incentive that brings about marriage as a covenant of love and physical union. Conjugal love, therefore, cannot be regarded simply as an element accompanying physical union. This love gives meaning to the whole of married life and is the direct

*Since God is love he will be praised by the very love of the spouses for each other and for their children.*

cause of the act that brings human life into existence. In willing his children to be born of this most intimate expression of human love, God wills also that they grow in the atmosphere of that love, which should be the first experience of the affection that should thereafter warm the life of the child and nourish his development as a person.

In his encyclical on Christian marriage *Casti Connubii*, Pius XI taught: "Love is the firm foundation of the family community." It is the solid ground on which alone marriage and the family can survive and flourish. The very essence of the marriage sacrament is participation by grace in the partnership of love between Christ and his people. If love is relegated to a secondary place in the sacrament or relegated to a disincarnate spirituality, how can marriage, as an outward sign of inward grace, impart an intimate experience of Christ's love to the man and wife and through them to their children?

The order of love on all its levels must be recognized as the final criterion of morality and of "chastity" particularly. It must be realized fully that the real measure of virtue or sin in married life is the degree of expression or denial of affection, respect, consideration, and encouragement of the unique and whole personality of the other, created by God, chosen as the companion on the way to salvation and as the co-parent of one's children. Sexual morality is entirely subordinate to this primary principle. Love determines the health and success of marriage, of parenthood, and of all the virtues which are necessary to a full living out of daily life.

Spouses must know, then, what genuine love is and what promotes this kind of love. It is the chief purpose of these pages on marriage to indicate the direction in which genuine expressions of love might be sought and found. As long as spouses are trying sincerely to get a deeper understanding of true love and trying to realize this love more effectively, they are on the road to salvation; they are living according to their vocation.

#### THE FRUITFULNESS OF LOVE

Just as Christ's love is infinitely fruitful, so the love that is the special grace and mission of the sacrament of marriage is directed

toward fruitfulness. Only when a husband and wife know that love is the most important element in marriage will they not despair when they want children but cannot have them. They will know how fruitful their redeemed love can still be for themselves and for the world around them.

In emphasizing that love is the greatest thing in marriage, it is necessary, in order not to be misunderstood, to reflect more deeply on what the word "love" means for Christian married people. In novels and movies, the word "love" often means only a passionate "being in love", or even a ruthless infatuation which contradicts the great commandment of love as God's own love reveals it.

Love is the most important and most lasting thing in marriage only when it comes from God and leads to God. This does not mean, however, that we are concerned only with a purely "supernatural" love. The greatest element in marriage is love in its *totality*, grounded in God but giving a divine splendor and eternal dignity to the natural affection between a man and a woman as this is expressed through their particular personalities.

The sacrament of marriage sanctifies married love, which expresses itself not only in conjugal union but also in the ordinary activities of everyday married life. Sexual love, with all its intensity and pleasure, is not something the sacrament of marriage somehow sets apart from supernatural Christian love; rather, it should be completely permeated and shaped by that love, which is an unmerited gift of the Holy Spirit. It should become increasingly so.

A passionate "being in love" may vanish or waver. It is possible that at times the married couple will suffer because of each other; but they must never come to the fatal position: "We will continue to love each other in a spiritual way, but we cannot show any fondness for one another anymore." Spiritual love in marriage is not genuine if it is incapable of making the marital relationship affectionate, kind, and capable of gratitude, or at least generous in merciful pardon and understanding.

#### MARRIAGE AS THE GIVING OF LIFE

When we say that the greatest thing in marriage is love, we do not mean that the orientation of marriage toward the child recedes into the background. In Christian marriage the child is no more of a secondary consideration than love is. If love is the foundation, the structure, and the crown of marriage, the bringing forth of life in love is the distinctive meaning of marriage.

Married love and the giving of life are not separate and unconnected elements. By its very nature the form of married love requires assent to the creation of life. If this basic affirmation is lacking, then it is possible to speak only of a human friendship or an unordered sexual relationship, but not of a marriage.

If, on the other hand, a married couple wanted children as heirs of their business, or simply because life would seem dull without them, it would be wrong for them to bring those children into the world if their union did not express a genuine conjugal love for each other. They would have missed the essence and the inner meaning of marriage just as much as those who seek a passionate sexual relationship but do not want to bring forth life.

The child not only has a right to the love of his parents for him, but an even more fundamental right to the love of his parents for one another. For the children as well as for the parents, the love is essential: the love with which God blesses the parents, the love they have for God and for each other, and the loyal and united love with which they consent, in a responsible way, to the awakening and nurturing of new life and the raising of their children.

This should be a love which welcomes not just a single child but that ideal number which God, through his gifts of health and capability, desires from the couple. It should be a devotion which lays the foundation for the love between brothers and sisters and for all Christian love in the world.

## *A Sacred Partnership*

*"Let the spouses, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of soul, and the work of mutual sanctification."*  
Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 52.

**I**N RECENT DECADES, Christians have encountered a widespread tendency to consider marriage and the family as purely secular and temporal matters. Many have been influenced by this misconception.

The social chaos that has resulted from such an attitude, however, is bringing about its own reaction. Even before Vatican Council II, Christians were regaining a revitalized and deepened awareness of the religious nature of marriage and the family. In America, in Europe and in other areas of the world the same reawakening has been taking place.

### **A NEW UNDERSTANDING**

This reawakening is more than just an awareness of a danger; it is a genuine renewal, a development in its own right. Both married and unmarried persons are deepening their understanding of marriage, seeing it as a vocation, a call from God, a holy way of life, a source of

THE WORLD BELONGS TO  
WHOEVER OFFERS IT THE  
GREATER HOPE

mutual fulfillment and sanctification. There is special recognition of the real meaning, the grace, and the mission of marriage as a sacrament.

If we look through Catholic books on marriage that are popular today, we see at first glance that a tremendous change has taken place within the last thirty years. The one-sided materialism that dwelt chiefly upon external obligations toward this earthly life, and the individualistic view of salvation that gave self-centered motivation for one's moral efforts, have clearly receded in favor of a more positive and total religious view where life and religion meet each other in truth.

What are the most important characteristics of this newly-awakened marital outlook?

By consenting to the bond of love which the Lord has raised to the dignity of a sacrament, and which so deeply affects their life, the marriage partners exchange — before God and in the presence of the Church community — vows of faithfulness binding for their entire lives. This mutual gift of each to the other is the beginning of an existence directed toward the glorification of God, to a spiritual communion characterized also by the fully human and religious education of the children whom God will give them to prepare for his kingdom.

#### AN IMAGE OF TRIUNE LOVE

The Christian family can be regarded as a reflection of the triune love of God. The proper love and responsibility between husband and wife and between parents and children is the most faithful earthly representation of the "threefold love." In the family we see imaged the depth and scope of the mystery of the triune God.

If husband and wife love one another tenderly and selflessly and, in their affection for their children, foster that deep and abiding unity that leads them to cooperate with God's creative love, then they mutually provide one another with a vital sense of the devotion with which God loves us in the body of Christ; even more, they provide a sense of the divine love of the Father, Son, and Spirit in their perfect unity.

#### SACRAMENTAL CONSECRATION

Today there is a deeper comprehension than in past centuries of what sacramental consecration means for the married couple and for the community of the family. Through the consecration of the sacrament, their whole life together can bear witness to the reality of marriage as a way to sanctity, a way of redeemed love.

Thomas Aquinas held that "a sacrament is a sign of a divine reality, to the extent that it sanctifies human beings." The sacrament of marriage gives the marriage partners a share in the sanctifying love of Christ for the Church and in the grateful, serving love of the Church for her divine bridegroom, to the extent that the spouses are truly signs of that love for each other.

Every sacrament makes possible a personal meeting with Christ. In matrimony the sacrament establishes a sacred, indissoluble bond between husband and wife. The unique element in this sacrament is that husband and wife *together* encounter the love of Christ which unites them. Their salvation depends upon the love they bear toward one another, both in everyday life and in their most intimate union.

Through their marital partnership they minister, each to the other, divine graciousness and love. Their life together now has the high purpose of bringing each other closer to the sacrificial love of Christ as manifested by him on the cross, and to his victorious love in the resurrection. The more selflessly they live for one another, the more they belong to Christ; the more intimately they love Christ together, the greater is their mutual belonging to one another.

#### A SACRED UNION

The redemptive task of husband and wife, their journey to God together, their mutual work toward that complete partnership which is the ideal of the sacrament, establishes the foundation of their responsibility toward their children.

Parents are the first and most important "pastors" for their children. They fulfill this role not only by their advice and directives, but

most effectively by their unfailing witness to the divine love existing within them as they make it manifest to their children and to all men.

They have both the authority and the mission to act as ministers of salvation in proclaiming the good tidings of the Gospel to their children; through word and example, they bring their children daily closer to the love of Christ. As religious teachers — assuming their union with the Church — their authority over their children is a pastoral one, similar to that of the bishop over his diocese, for the sacred community of the family is essentially a participation in the mystery of the Church as the community of God's people loving one another.

#### ONLY A BEGINNING

Is this view of the redemptive partnership of the Christian marriage commonly held by Catholics today? There is no doubt that the view is gaining ground but at best the answer can be that it is only beginning to prevail in the long and difficult struggle against a barren moralism and the secularist distortions still widespread among Christians.

Investigations in various countries indicate that considerable emphasis is still being placed on marrying "in the Church," but that the "I do" spoken at the altar is by no means always the "I do" of a thorough-going and conscious commitment to the sacred mission of the marriage sacrament. The Church wedding is widely accepted as a solemn occasion but the accompanying moral teaching of the Church on marriage is not always respected with the same seriousness.

How many families today, even those that might have the practice of family prayers and other religious activities, would include expressly religious ideals among the highest educational goals they would hold for their children? The virtues in which most Christians would choose to train their children are scarcely distinguishable from the ideals of respectable nonbelievers.

While it is true that many, if not most, of the moral values fostered in contemporary education originated in the Christian view of the

world, a consciously religious concept of the task of education is still almost as rare among Catholic as among nonCatholic Christians. Yet it is an undeniable and encouraging fact that there is a growing number of Christians, happy in their faith, who out of ever-deepening conviction are seeking genuine sanctification, a way of redeemed love to the praise of God, in marriage and through marriage. This is a hopeful sign for the future.

## *Married Love and the Sacraments*

*“Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments . . . sanctifies almost every event in their lives; they are given access to the stream of divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ.”*  
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Art. 61.

WHEN THE BRIDAL COUPLE, through their mutual consent at the altar, enter together into the sacred covenant of marriage, they give a solemn assent to the sanctifying role that the Creator and Savior instituted for marriage and the family. This mutual assent leads them more deeply into Christ's new and everlasting covenant of love.

The sacramental “I do” is a vow, a sacred oath to strive in marriage constantly toward a love as faithful as that with which Christ loves his people and sanctifies them. It is a consent stemming from confidence in the power of that “love beyond all understanding” which Christ made visible on the cross. It voices assurance of an ability to persevere in an enduring love that shares in the victory of Christ in the resurrection; for “Christ abides with them so that they may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal” (*Church in the Modern World*, Art. 48).

LOVE IS THE FIRM FOUNDATION  
OF THE FAMILY COMMUNITY.

The sacrament of marriage receives its full significance as a sign of the redemptive love of Christ for his Church and of the Church for him, from both its own sacramental quality and its relationship to those other sacraments that enrich the lives of the spouses. These in their variety and essential unity, reveal the diversity and unifying wholeness of the sacred covenant of marriage.

#### MARRIAGE AND BAPTISM

Through their baptism the bride and groom were adopted into the new and eternal covenant of love and became members of Christ's Church, his community. Now, through their mutual consent before the altar, which signifies Christ, and before the priest and witnesses, who represent the community, they can understand their bond of love as a participation in the sanctifying mutual love of Christ and the Church.

The loyalty which they pledged to Christ in the baptismal vow now finds special fulfillment in their marital loyalty. This loyalty of the couple, pledged to each other and to Christ, constitutes an act of praise of Christ's own faithfulness, and participation in the faithfulness of the whole community to Christ.

#### MARRIAGE AND CONFIRMATION

In confirmation the young man and woman received joy and strength from the Holy Spirit, that they might become witnesses to love and faith in all situations of life. The Holy Spirit is the gift and the bond of love personified. In him and through him the people of God are united, and through this unity the Church bears witness to the world that she is Christ's.

The unity of husband and wife in their efforts toward sanctity is a gift from the Holy Spirit and thus an important part of that witness to unity which will guide the world to faith in Christ (Jn. 17). As confirmed Christians the husband and wife are enabled to encourage in each other a selfless and loyal affection, ready for any sacrifice, so that in an ever deeper fashion they may participate in the love Christ gave

to mankind through his sacrifice on the cross and continues to give to them in his sacraments.

The Greek word for witness is “martyrion.” All the sacrifices, all the self-denials, the perseverance in conjugal love and fidelity throughout the difficult test of life and in mutual suffering and joy: these bear witness to a faith granted by the power of the Holy Spirit. All of them increasingly strengthen and bring to perfection, in the married couple and in their children, a faith and love that will flow out from the home and family into the world and beyond all the confines of time and place.

#### MARRIAGE AND PENANCE

In the sacrament of penance Christ purifies his people of all that runs counter to the love of God and neighbor. He cleanses and strengthens the love that works for perfection.

Married people, even the best, and perhaps especially the best, become painfully aware again and again that their love is not yet perfect but is only on its way: a striving, struggling love similar to that of the whole Church in its earthly pilgrimage. But husband and wife need not lose heart over this awareness of their marital imperfection. They should place their confidence in the cleansing and healing power of Christ, just as the whole Church relies on the love of Christ which is patient, generous, and faithful beyond all measure.

Reception of the sacrament of penance signifies a constant renewal and deepening of the affirmation spoken at the marriage altar, a strengthening of a steadfast will for growth in conjugal affection.

It is a general custom for the bride and groom to go with one another to confession before they enter the covenant of marriage through their mutual consent. They know what this mutually received sacrament can mean for their lifetime covenant with one another. If Christ purifies them of all that stands in the way of their love for him, then this also means a removal of all that could hinder them in faithful and self-sacrificing love for one another.

If possible the married couple should go to confession in common. Not only do they thus learn humbly to admit their shortcomings to

themselves and to each other, but they become ever more conscious that their love for God and their love for each other are mutually and inseparably dependent. They understand better, then, that their covenant requires an on-going reconciliation, readiness to forgive and to ask for forgiveness.

#### MARRIAGE AND THE EUCHARIST

The right of the baptized Christian to co-celebrate the Eucharist is a sign of his inclusion in the family of Christ, whose bond of mutual love we celebrate in this most holy sign of the covenant. Active participation in the Eucharist means a continual reaffirmation of the Christian calling to live within and from the power of this covenant of love uniting Christ and his family.

Whenever a married couple participate together in the celebration of the Eucharist, they not only give assent to their calling as Christians but also to their special vocation of marriage. Through their participation they mutually promise to stand together in the covenant of love and to make the love of Christ ever more manifest to each other. Their love, of course, should not show itself only in their mutual participation in the Eucharist, but also, as a continuing thanksgiving and praise of God's redeeming love, in the intimacy of conjugal tenderness, in patience with one another, in the innumerable small actions of everyday existence.

#### MARRIAGE AND THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

The bridal couple pledge their fidelity to one another “until death do us part.” Death should be regarded as the seal of their loyalty. The anointing of the sick sanctifies the Christian in his suffering and/or for his final and decisive assent to the will of God. In this way it prepares him for the eternal celebration of the covenant of love with Christ.

Whenever one of the marriage partners receives the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, it is usually his life's companion who has made him aware of the seriousness of his situation and who helps him

to speak his final and greatest “I do” with the same readiness with which he gave assent to his baptismal and marital vows.

At the deathbed of the loved one, both partners now understand with final clarity the sublime meaning of their life together: it is a common journey to God, the test and purification of their love for Christ and each other, and their mutual desire for the eternal happiness of perfect love in the communion of saints, in the concelebration of God’s blissful love.

## *Affection and Continence*

*“Marriage . . . as an unbreakable compact between persons, and the welfare of the children, both demand that the mutual love of the spouses, too, be embodied in a right ordered manner, that it grow and ripen.”*

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 50.

**M**ARITAL LOVE is the source of generous, responsible parenthood and of marital chastity, which means tender, faithful love, profound respect for the marriage partner, and reverence for the mystery, gift and purpose of marriage.

Irrevocable assent to fruitfulness distinguishes marital affection from all other forms of human relationship. The more passionate, respectful and affectionate their conjugal love is, the more courageous and responsible is the married couple’s readiness to engender life and also the more confirmed is the chastity of their marriage. The child is regarded not only as the supreme gift of conjugal love but also as a profoundly important goal for it, its most visible fulfillment. Similarly, chastity in marriage does not somehow stand apart from true conjugal affection; it is the essential core of its expression.

The cooperation of the marriage partners with God’s creative love is a service performed by a high order of love. By calling forth

*...This ideal image of husband and wife in the early stages of marriage, when all is view through the eyes of enthusiastic and excited love, is bound sooner or later to undergo varying degrees of adjustment.*

life in a love that is infinite in its depth, God reveals his desire that the marriage partners themselves should feel the most intimate and tender love for each other.

The joy of this intimate love cannot come from self-seeking nor, on the other hand, can it be lessened by meaningful self-denial. If the good of spouse or of children at some time requires a period of continence, then self-denial becomes, here and now, the highest expression of true marital love, sharing in a way Christ's sacrificial love manifested in its highest degree on the cross. In such a case, however, the continence of the married couple must be made bearable through the generous expression of other kinds of conjugal affection. Self-denial for itself is not advocated, but self-denial for the sake of a tender, faithful love.

#### AFFECTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

An affection that is inventive in its forms of expression is an indispensable part of love at any time in a healthy marriage, and especially so at those times when conjugal or parental responsibility dictates a period of continence. To the marriage partners such affection is an essential factor in the art of giving joy to one another, in continually demonstrating anew their love for each other and keeping this love fresh.

Deep mutual affection covers the marital union like a rich garment. With it the union can never degenerate into mere self-seeking satisfaction. Tenderness — those loving words and caresses of married people — as a way of expressing marital love, takes up within itself the sexual element in the narrower physical sense and transforms it into an intimate communication of that affection with which the "I" loves the "Thou." It is always more than just a part of the sexual encounter; it is a reflection of the gentle radiance that fills the everyday life which the husband and wife share together.

For married people to suppose that affectionate caresses have their sole function in those most intimate moments of love-making in marital life is a serious error. These tender expressions are all the more necessary when those moments must be sacrificed for some reason. The deep

and total love of the spouses for each other must never cease to be expressed in one way or another, for it is the vitality of this affection that assures both marital chastity and the mutual willingness to bring life responsibly into the world and to guarantee harmony and peace in the education of the children.

The sexual act, even if performed with the express desire of having children, would be brutish if it were lacking in the tenderness and the varied art of expression, by each partner to the other, of a mutually acknowledged devotion and a grateful acceptance of it. Likewise, a continence from which tenderness, mutual kindness, and the constant assurance of appreciation is absent makes of a marriage little more than a cold contractual relationship between a man and a woman. Married people should relate the tenderness of their union and their graciousness to each other, to the religious concept of grace.

#### MUTUAL SELF-CONTROL

Outside of marriage, chastity does not permit any physical expressions of affection that border on conjugal love. (Love between engaged couples, however, who know how to exchange expressions of affection without encouraging the temptation toward sexual union reserved for marriage alone, is an important preparation for conjugal love: timely insurance that their love will remain always considerate of each other and directed toward the sanctifying ends of Christian marriage.)

Unless there is the desire and ability on the part of the married partners to make each other happy, marital chastity cannot have a firm basis. Tenderness is an essential ingredient in this ability. If marital chastity, in its total meaning of ethical integrity in the matter of sex, is the result of a strong and faithful conjugal love, then the continence that may be necessary from time to time must likewise be a clear demonstration of that same love. It would not be so if either partner, out of self-interest, were to deny the other partner generous expressions of affection, for marital chastity is a mutual thing. In marriage, genuine self-concern can exist only in terms of both partners, in a mutual effort for self-control and consideration for each other.

There are women — and sometimes men — who consider themselves especially chaste or especially heroic if, during periods of necessary (or even arbitrary) continence, they abstain from giving their marriage partners any physical expressions of affection whatever. Those who follow such a pattern do not understand the true meaning of marital chastity, the very essence of which is that special kind of self-giving love between married persons that expresses itself generously and graciously in unfailing consideration of one another.

In these unfortunate cases the neglected spouse is made unnecessarily uncertain and unhappy. It can also happen that one treated in this way, feeling depressed and no longer loved, cannot or does not cope with his own impulses. Either he is thrown back upon himself in isolation or he seeks compensation in extramarital relationships. This is not to deny that it is, or may be, also his fault, and very seriously so, if things go to such an extreme. Nevertheless the "self-controlled" spouse who does not care for expressions of tender love is not being chaste in a truly conjugal way. Such "chastity" is either so self-centered or so rigid that there is no room for gratitude for the love of the other and not sufficient concern for meeting, in other ways, the marriage partner's need for the assurance of love. Thus a crisis in their conjugal life is brought about.

#### THE ART OF CONTROLLED LOVE

The objection is often made, "But it is too hard to be concerned about tenderness toward one another and still maintain continence for a long time." No one should deny that this is very difficult; we must not try to give a simplistic answer to a grave problem. Vatican Council II acknowledged that "where the intimacy of married life is broken off, it is not rare for its faithfulness to be imperiled and its quality of fruitfulness ruined. For then the upbringing of the children and the courage to accept new ones are both endangered" (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Art. 51).

It is important to recognize that the emphasis in the Council's total treatment of marriage is clearly on the necessity "to nourish and

The beauty of the church; her fertility; her power of attraction, and her missionary dynamism depend mainly on the love her members have for one another in witness to their love for Christ.

develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection" (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Art. 49). The nourishing of this love must continue even — or especially — when a couple may decide, in sincere conscience, that their family should not be increased at this time. And even if, during extended periods of continence, expressions of marital affection might sometimes result in an unintended sexual climax, the accident can be considered calmly as the outcome of the greater good: the fostering of conjugal love.

Any one-sided "self-control" that tends to shut out the other partner in marriage not only isolates the other but runs the risk of isolating quite as much the partner who has "controlled" himself. In marriage it should never be a question of bare "self" control any more than a matter of selfish "self" realization. What must be fostered and controlled is the manner of expressing marital love. But the love must continue to be expressed always, though in a different way. The necessary inventiveness in love's expression is an art, one which must be constantly learned anew.

Continence in marriage, without concern for mutual expressions of affection, cannot serve the fruitfulness that is the purpose of conjugal love. Instead, it endangers the very quality of a love which should keep them ready to bestow life in a responsible way. Some advocates of birth control would solve the matter simply by supplying information about all the different artificial means of contraception, with no concern for the fundamental decision of responsible parenthood and the genuine qualities of tender affection. If, today, a majority of lay leaders and many theologians are of the opinion that the traditional arguments against the use of all artificial means of birth control are not convincing, they do not at all think that the use of those means would resolve marriage problems automatically, without any need for self-control. Those who not only use artificial means of birth control, but also carelessly "use" the other person, thus bar the path to mutual appreciation in self-giving affection. They destroy the mutual respect without which conjugal love cannot live.

If, after serious thought and prayer, spouses come to the conviction that they should try to resolve the problem of harmonizing the demands

of faithful love with the responsible regulation of birth, then they have to be even more concerned not to endanger mutual appreciation and respect. In other words: artificial means, as well as total or periodic continence, do not by themselves resolve this problem. Whether the spouses abide with the traditional approach and a strict interpretation of Pope Paul's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, or are forced by the conflict of duties and values to follow the indications given by great and honored episcopates (French, Canadian, German, and so on) their chief concern must always be not to yield to a self-seeking pleasure-making but to cultivate a tender and respectful affection. They never will simply rely either on technical means or technical calculations, nor on a rigid system of abstinence and anguished "self-control". Conjugal love cannot live without mutual respect and tender attention.

It should be seen clearly that there are no simple "solutions". God does not require of a human being that he be perfect from the beginning and always find the perfect answer. It would be most unrealistic for married people to expect one another to be already perfected in love and generosity or to be always able to find correct solutions for their most complex problems. But it is necessary that they steadfastly set out on the path to perfection, to an even greater and more generous love, to try to make progress in it without causing each other to become discouraged through periods of temporary denial or by their daily imperfections.

Wherever such mutual determination and concern are present, husband and wife need not fear that partial frustration and temporary hurt will destroy their love for each other or for God. Their patient effort and long-suffering love is firmly supported by God's patience with men. But besides their trust in divine reconciliation they would do well to ask themselves honestly, especially in periods of deprivation and failure, whether they are really working for a constantly more perfect love and a better mutual expression of it.

One requirement is to keep in the clear direction of the ideal goal; another is to find the best possible step which, here and now, keeps

them moving forward together in their covenant of love. The ideal has to be approached realistically, according to the "law of growth". This point is particularly emphasized by the declaration of the Italian episcopate to *Humanae Vitae*. However, one should not confine its application just to the one problem of harmonizing the need of love and affection with responsible regulation of births; the whole married life must be lived in this perspective.

## *Ideal and Reality*

*“Christians will wholeheartedly cultivate the values of the family, both setting an example in their private life and combining their efforts with those of people of good will. In this way, overcoming difficulties, they will provide for the needs and interests of the family which the new times require.”*  
Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 52.

THE SAYING “marriages are made in heaven” is to Christians an expression of confidence that their marriage and their marriage partner were specifically intended for them and given to them by God’s saving love. When they pledge themselves to each other before the altar, their word of consent is an acknowledgment that God is their trustworthy guardian and helper. They view their married life, with all its joy and pain, all the striving for and mutual sharing of those things which are good, true, and beautiful, as a heaven-sent and heaven-directed gift.

But marriages are lived on earth, in the harsh reality of the world, and marriage cannot be expected to remove the two partners from the conflicts and dangers that are part of this reality. The ideal is lofty but the reality is only a more or less successful rough sketch which leaves many things to be desired. The key to success and happiness in marriage

If married Christians want their witness to be accepted in today's world, they must avoid confusion between mere encrusted customs of thought or behavior and basic, unchangeable truths.

lies in the will to persevere in love in the face of this ever-present tension between ideal and reality.

#### A REALISTIC VIEW OF THE PARTNER

Although they may not be aware of it, the love of newly married couples is usually tied to a dream. To be sure, the *other* is a real person, and one's own gift of self to the other is real, yet this other still remains a personality apart, wrapped in an idealization that conceals both his highest qualities and his depths.

This ideal image of husband and wife in the early stages of a marriage, when all is viewed through the eyes of enthusiastic and excited love, is bound sooner or later to undergo varying degrees of adjustment. This does not mean that the growing discovery of the other necessarily brings disappointment to their love or a diminution of it. It simply means that the life they share together is a continuous, progressive apprenticeship, a path to deeper understanding and fuller acceptance. The time comes when their hitherto unripened love must mature and deepen as it accepts and loves the partner as he or she really is, in order ultimately to glimpse — somewhere along the mutual journey of discovery — that ineffable name by which God, the Creator and Savior, has always known one's mate.

Only if both partners follow this path of discovery and growth together, with the will to persevere and to help one another, will they eventually find the real "I" and the real "Thou." Only then will they understand the community of love which it is their task to build together. The ideal, noble from the beginning yet still nebulous and somewhat unreal, becomes concrete. Through contact with the realities that form the web of their actual existence — elements containing unsuspected riches beneath their everyday surface — they come to a more tangible realization of their ideals.

They learn again and again that the meaning of their sacred and sanctifying union is to transform everything — their strivings and failures, their joys and discouragements — into a means of salvation. Over and over they are led to see that true conjugal love is necessarily fortifying.

fied by trials but continues always to believe in the nobility and salvation that the other brings. Even in moments of bitter disappointment, such a love can always discover the person of Christ in the other — even though sometimes in an indistinct and disfigured way — and discover it with ever-increasing faith and hope. The beauty of the earlier relationship is not lost, only changed to a maturer beauty that has learned to accept with serenity those human deficiencies that are inevitably woven into a personal love, and those trials that are just as inevitably woven into the life of love itself.

It is somehow inherent in the vocation of marriage that neither of the partners can become what he should become, according to God's purpose for him, without the help of the other partner, or — and this insight is even more urgent — without that inventive power of selfless love which helps the other partner to discover his own best potential. Through this generous, self-forgetting, *other*-directed love, each partner comes to share the spiritual riches of the other, as well as to overcome dangers that may threaten him because of some limitation or faulty behavior in the other.

Not only the real "thou" is discovered in marriage. Each partner must also discover himself, and constantly assess what he contributes to or takes away from the unifying power of the conjugal relationship. He must re-examine regularly and humbly his own sense of values, his own goals, his own capacity to recognize and correct his failings.

In assessing their weaknesses and strengths, it is especially important for married couples to understand the benefits or disadvantages that they bring to their marriage from the family and background of each. Before they marry, and particularly during the first years of marriage, both partners must try, in a calm and sympathetic way, to get a clear idea of the heritage that each has brought to the marriage in terms of experience, ideals, anxieties, prejudices, inhibitions: all those things which everyone incorporates into himself from his early environment and particularly from his family.

The example of parents, and especially of the relationship that existed between them, has a very definite influence on the shape of one's

own marriage, even if the influence takes the negative form of "I don't intend to do as my mother or father did in this situation." The more gratefully one sees and accepts the things which are good in such a heritage, the more calmly will one be able to protect his own marriage from harmful outside influence.

A young man and a young woman leave father and mother in order to belong to one another undividedly; but this undividedness usually is secure only when they also are in accord in their love for their parents on both sides. What degree of familiarity and closeness of ties, of proximity or distance, or of aloofness and reserve toward relatives is good for a particular marriage, must be decided in each case through mutual agreement by the marriage partners.

Sociological investigations show that many marriages fail as a result of unjustified interference by parents or other relatives, or because of a too close and one-sided tie between one partner of the marriage and his parental home. But in an even greater number of cases the influence of the original families plays a helpful role. Married couples, therefore, should not measure their own conduct by some perhaps unfortunate experiences of close friends and acquaintances but should judge together, in a spirit of generous charity toward all concerned, what is the right course in their own situation.

#### RELIGION IN THE REALITY OF LIFE

A generous acceptance of marriage with its joys and its trials does not mean that we blind ourselves to the difficulties inherent in a very complicated reality. The extent of a married couple's realization of what their Christian calling really is, and the extent to which they are prepared to be deliberate witnesses to that ideal, can be accurately measured by their recognition of the realities that confront them and the courage with which they go forth to meet them.

Even Christians full of good will and good intentions can become victims of the long-term pressures of everyday realities. They may still look upon their marriage as the road to salvation, as a communion of love that brings them and their children closer to the exalting experi-

ence of God's eternal love; yet sometimes they lose sight of the fact that the call to salvation and the call to everyday life are one and the same thing, that no gap should exist between religion and life. They forget that the glorification of God is not a task removed from the ups and downs of life but is in the very midst of them. It is through these activities that Christians bear witness. This is what the dogma of the sacramental nature of Christian marriage means. The sacrament is not a simple blessing added to a marriage; marriage is a sacrament in itself. It is, we repeat, *itself* a sacred and saving reality, to the extent that the spouses accept the calling and grace of God that comes through it.

More than a symbol of the love that unites Christ and his Church, marriage participates in this love. One of the sufferings of Christ, on which this mystical bond is based, derives its meaning from the sins of humanity, the sins and weaknesses of the Church whom he took as his spouse. Christ bears her deficiencies with patience, sanctifies her, in order to present to himself a spouse "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Married Christians share in this mystical experience through their mutual love which is patient, enduring, compassionate, yet filled with the ardor of hope and faith.

Our whole existence is spent in the confrontation of ideals with reality. We are wanderers between two worlds. Joy and strength lie in the prospect of the ultimate realization of the ideal, which can be only partially realized in our own short-lived moment. But this moment can be one of joyous achievement if we keep our eyes firmly on the ideal while making use of all the positive possibilities in all the realities that surround us. Thus we celebrate gratitude in hope.

## *Permanence and Change in Values*

*"...the deposit of faith or revealed truths are one thing; the manner in which they are formulated without violence to their meaning and significance is another."*

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 62.

ONE OF THE MOST urgent matters that had to be faced by the Council of Trent, and surely one of the most serious that confronted the recent Second Vatican Council, was the need to distinguish clearly between what is unchangeable in the dogma and life of the Church and what is subject to revision. A great deal of the tensions of the post-conciliar era arises from lack of discernment.

With regard to the position of the Church on Christian marriage there is need to ask what, in this domain, is divine revelation and what is mere human tradition, adaptations to the thought and culture of past ages. In other words, what in fidelity to divine revelation, is a faithful response to the new needs?

These questions could be more successfully explored by the recent Council than ever before, since for the first time all the cultures of the contemporary world were individually represented by the Conciliar bishops and their advisers. Moreover, the biblical renewal, a return to patristic sources, and a broader concept of theology have enriched

The unity of husband and wife in their efforts toward sanctity is a gift from the Holy Spirit and thus an important part of that witness to unity which will guide the world to faith in Christ.

our appreciation of the problem. We can see more clearly now what, from the beginning and for all time, has formed a part of the teaching of the Church, and what has been merely entrenched attitudes or customs which answered the needs of a particular epoch in the past.

#### FAITH IS NOT A CATALOGUE OF THINGS

Inevitably all changes in church documents or methods of worship, all modification of ecclesiastical laws or, more importantly, of dogmatic formulas, alarm and worry certain people, even shake their faith. For this reason Pope John XXIII, when opening the Council, emphasized what he considered an absolute imperative, namely, the clear differentiation between the truth itself and the trappings in which it has been clothed through the centuries.

Truth expresses itself, even in Holy Scripture, within a certain context: that of the limited thought, and life-experience of a particular time. The splendor of the fundamental deposit of truth, however, cannot be dimmed by incidental errors in the ideological framework or setting in which it may be presented throughout the centuries.

For instance, our ancestors, holding to a preconceived idea of the cosmos, argued that the earth must be the center of the universe, since God had chosen it as the birthplace of his Son. When Galileo pointed out that the earth turns around the sun rather than vice versa, his pronouncements scandalized prelates and theologians who did not distinguish between truth and its clothing, between the element in a dogma upon which salvation depends and the setting in which the dogma is expressed. Yet the essential truth in this case remained unchanged: that the Word became flesh on earth, this modest satellite.

To those of deeper understanding this truth became even more exciting in the new perspective. They understood from it that man is deceived when his conception of the universe is egocentric, that his own true nature, too, is to order his whole life to God even more than the earth is ordered to the sun. One's vision of the world may change, but faith will always be confirmed by and find ever greater depth in each such new scientific enlightenment.

#### FREEDOM WITH RESPECT TO HUMAN TRADITIONS

These principles apply also to marriage. Only a clearer idea of all the dimensions of marriage and its mystery can liberate us from pre-conceived or outmoded "traditions" without diminishing in any way the eternal content of truth expressed in revelation. An instructive example can be seen in Thomas Aquinas' teachings on the natural law as it concerns the procreative act.

Noting that in this act the human being shares in a function common to all animals, Thomas says: "It follows that anything with which all animals are in accord is necessarily in conformance with natural law" (*S. Th. I-II*, q. 94, a.2). Not intending to detract from the personal and spiritual relationships that differentiate the sexuality of man from that of animals, he referred to what man has in common with animals as the "primary" purpose of sexual relationship, and characterized as a "secondary" purpose what man alone possesses, namely, conjugal love insofar as it is a personal love.

The truth he sought to convey was that the natural purposes of sexual intimacy were the procreation and the upbringing of children in an environment of love. The problem is, in the first place, that the accepted meaning of words change. Many people no longer are aware that to Thomas the meaning of "secondary purpose" was not a negative value-judgment but simply a differentiation of what is distinctive for the human person, an expression for the supreme quality of love.

In the second place, the *biological* disparity between the mating of animals and the sexuality of the human species was not well enough known in Thomas' time. He held what was the generally accepted view of his times, that in sexual contact — whether between human beings or animals — the seed of the male was the only determinant of procreation, and when the conjugal act failed to achieve its procreative function, this seemed to be due only to certain unfavorable conditions. Incidentally, he also echoed Aristotle's view that, by nature law, man (male) is meant to procreate a male, a boy, and from that it followed that the birth of a girl was a partial failure "*mas occasionatum*"!

In these details of the *setting* in which he presented his thought, Thomas was not, of course, an interpreter of revealed truths but simply

the victim of the limitations of his time and of a human "tradition". Today we know that, biologically, the procreative function of a human couple is limited to only a few days of each month. From this we understand that the Creator, in his wisdom, intended for a married couple many sexual contacts having no other direct significance than the expression of their mutual love, in order that the awakening of new life and the development of a child of God, born for eternity, will take place in this atmosphere of love and intimate union between the parents.

Our new knowledge of the natural sciences, however, does not at all mean that man may arbitrarily alter either the meaning or the expression of the marriage union. Procreation and the raising of children, together with the fostering of human love, still remain the specific functions of marriage. All conjugal life, and particularly all sexual intimacy, must be given the full meaning and the best possible expression of a love which makes the partners available for this service of life.

The fact remains, however, that a service of such importance as this must be undertaken in full awareness and conscientious responsibility. Not each conjugal act need be intended as an act of procreation. But while an actual transmission of life would sometimes be against reason and true conjugal or parental love, the expression of conjugal union still has its full meaning. For the good of the couple and for the fulfillment of their parental vocation they should resolve their problem in accordance with the word of the Scripture, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder". In conflict of values, the conjugal unity prevails over merely biological "laws".

#### HIGHER DEMANDS ARISING FROM GREATER KNOWLEDGE

While our new knowledge confers new capacities upon us, it also places higher demands on the conscience than ever before. Married couples now approach conjugal union in view of the variety of functions of marriage. They do not always have the intention to procreate. Often their only or their chief intention is to express and foster their mutual love or to assure that harmony which is so necessary to the upbringing of their children. In one way or the other the communicative good and the procreative good of conjugal intercourse are related

to each other. With a deeper understanding of the Creator's design and all that it means, couples must give serious consideration to all the interwoven responsibilities entailed in their vocation of marriage, and try to fulfill them all with grateful generosity.

Conjugal and parental love cannot be thought of as two elements in loose juxtaposition; they are blended together, one in the other. Conjugal love can never be considered only in the perspective of its biological purpose. It is a gift bestowed on husband and wife as such, something granted by God which has his fullest blessing to the extent that it is fruitful for both earthly and eternal life for the spouses themselves, for their children if God grants them, and for the human family. Genuine love is always a wellspring of fruitfulness even though not always of an actual transmission of human life.

Revelation teaches us that God created man in his image, that He made the human being *man and woman*, and that he blessed them saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Clearly this was not a cold, stark commandment to married couples to see everything only in the perspective of procreation. It was, rather, a sacred mission filled with joy, a benediction of paternity and maternity, a blessing of genuine love, and an appeal to remain ever faithful to their covenant. They should fill the earth with love and with an off-spring which is loved and able to reciprocate love. It is not a matter of numbers.

The new relationship between family and child that has resulted from modern conditions of life presents another area wherein the *unchangeable* must be distinguished from the circumstantial. Formerly, society and economy were so constructed that the child was subordinated to the family. Large families were necessary for work on the farm or at the family craft, and as a safeguard for the parents' old age. Now, on the contrary, the family is oriented to the child. In our present industrialized, urban society, parents must be prepared to accept heavy sacrifices of long duration in order to prepare their children for modern social and professional life, but it is now society that benefits from their sacrifices rather than the family unit as in previous times.

In these circumstances, paternal and maternal desire for children becomes more clearly a disinterested virtue that proceeds from an abundance of conjugal love. It shows itself in new forms of responsibility in "refining the spirit of sacrifice" (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Art. 50). The moral value of parenthood can therefore no longer be gauged chiefly by the number of births, but by the degree of family generosity both in procreation and in the preparation of the children for fruitful lives. The merit of a family of two, three or five children today can be equal to, and possibly greater than that of a family of earlier times with ten or twelve children, many of whom perhaps were to die at an early age.

Yet it remains an unchangeable part of Christian doctrine that married couples, loving each other and united in this exclusive and indissoluble bond of love, should pass on to their children the essentially personal love they feel for one another, and in this way make it fruitful on the earth.

Even though not each sexual act may be intended for procreation, the more spiritual concept of marriage will encourage conscious dedication for the sake of the child, and will embody a greater sense of responsibility for his welfare. It will always be unchangeable and of primary importance that all intimate expressions of conjugal love should be characterized by a mutual sense of gratitude and self-giving. It will remain true and become even more evident that this love, if authentic, constitutes the source of and surest guarantee for the joys of parenthood. Through all social changes and all scientific advances, these truths remain valid. Removed from previous outdated settings, these truths now penetrate the consciences of married people with even more force. The abiding truth finds new expressions.

In all times, the greatest souls have lived the ideal of unity in love, which is something quite different from a life arbitrarily shared by two people. They have always welcomed children as a priceless gift of God and as a special sign of his blessing. In all times, Christian couples have been aware that conjugal love and service to life, accepted in a

spirit of consideration for the other person, brings serious responsibilities and heavy sacrifices. The type and extent of problems of conscience within the vocation of marriage have varied greatly from one age to another, but changes in the frame of living cannot affect the unchangeable aspects of married life. On the contrary, they can show them forth in a more brilliant light.

## *Responsible Parenthood*

*"Parents . . . will thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which may be foreseen. For this accounting they will reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they will consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church itself."*  
Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 50.

A DISTINGUISHED looking businessman says somewhat pontifically to his luncheon companions, "Parents can properly take care of only two children at most these days. We must give our children something better than we had, and even then who knows what may happen?"

Or a coldly efficient secretary in a loan office says, as a young couple leaves after an interview, "They're expecting a fifth child; they ought to know better!"

No one can deny that parental responsibility requires honest appraisal of all the circumstances that affect the birth and upbringing of children. It is now commonly accepted that there must be responsibility whenever new life is brought into the world. But knowledgeable and conscientious Christians understand by responsibility something quite different from that referred to by the prosperous businessman

Continence in marriage, without concern for mutual expressions of affection, cannot serve the fruitfulness that is the purpose of conjugal love.

whose only measurement of life's values is material comfort, or by the secretary who has carefully guarded against "consequences" in her own love affairs and looks upon marriage as a continuation of her strange kind of "responsibility".

#### THE TRUE MEANING OF RESPONSIBILITY

Christian morality has always taught and will always teach that it is morally indefensible to awaken new life *outside* the bond of marriage which alone gives the child the stability of home and love necessary for his proper upbringing. But also it teaches that within marriage the highest degree of responsibility is called for in the matter of procreation and education of children. A considerable growth of consciousness and deliberation in this matter is evident, as a result of the new conditions of life today.

The Church can only combat vigorously any attitude that represents the child as an obstacle to happiness or that seeks to limit the number of children in accordance with egotistical standards. But having made this clear, it upholds just as vigorously the ideal of joyous fertility linked with a sense of responsibility. A look to the past and to the historical circumstances can help us to understand better the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church in this burning problem of our century, and to come to a better appreciation of the difficulties and the merits of the teaching office, as well as to a just evaluation of its expressions.

Since the first centuries the Church has had to fight against strong gnostic and manichean trends which considered birth as one of the greatest evils. If abstinence could not be the solution to the problem, then all means of avoiding birth, including magic arts and abortion, were proposed as the lesser evil in comparison with the transmission of bodily life. The Church has rendered a most valuable service to the whole of humanity by defending vigorously the goodness of procreation.

Having been shaped by the passionate desire to fulfill this great religious and humanistic task, the official Church was extremely suspicious of the new movements of "planned parenthood" or "birth control" which arose in our century. Once more the goodness and

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sacredness of human life seemed to be questioned. In the campaign for systematic family planning, children — if more than one or two — were often presented as a threat to society and to the happiness of the spouses. All means of limiting birth seemed to be good, including abortion. From the viewpoint of social psychology it is quite understandable, then, that the reaction of the Church authority was as global and as total as the movement itself seemed to be.

When in 1930 the Lambeth Conference of the Anglical Church tried to disentangle the complex problem of responsible birth regulation by allowing means other than total continence, Pope Pius XI reacted by his extremely severe encyclical *Casti Connubii*. There the growing need of a conscious birth regulation was not yet integrated; almost all the attention was centered on the condemnation of any interference which would deprive the individual conjugal act of its "natural" fertility.

Each utterance of the Magisterium has to be seen against the historical background. At that time not only the fascist regime but also many other influential groups were fearful of the propaganda of planned parenthood as a threat to the existence and natural growth of the nation.

Not until Pius XII was a distinction made between the new perspective of responsible regulation of birth and the question of methods which might be approved as morally acceptable. In his address to the Italian midwives (September, 1951) he spoke of an honest "regulation of birth which, in contrast to an unnatural so-called birth-control, is compatible with the law of God".

Two aspects have to be clearly distinguished: 1) a regulation of birth which is based on a generous will to fulfill the parental vocation within the limits of the real possibilities; 2) the question of the methods. Since 1951 it has become increasingly clear in the official documents that the more fundamental question is that of responsible regulation inspired by generosity and informed by conscience. However, the question of what could be considered as morally acceptable methods or means for achieving this regulation was not yet clearly based on the

new, more fundamental vision of consciousness, awareness and deliberation in the transmission of life.

The Second Vatican Council has come to a clear distinction. The new consciousness in the decision is called responsible parenthood and is treated in *The Church in the Modern World*, Art. 50. The second question is approached under the most characteristic heading, "Harmonizing Conjugal Love with Responsible Transmission of Life" (Art. 51).

#### RESPONSIBLE TRANSMISSION OF LIFE

The concept of responsible parenthood implies much more than that of control, regulation or planning. For believers it means above all a *response* to the calling of the Creator, who wants the spouses to be conscious and generous cooperators of his creative love and to be "so to speak, interpreters of that love" (Art. 50). Thus the spouses affirm the goodness and high purpose of life by hoping and planning for that number of children which, in view of the realities of family and environmental circumstances, can be properly educated to serve God and man worthily.

This fertility, governed by a sense of responsibility, can be perfectly compatible with the grateful acceptance of even a dozen children in some cases or with a temporary — or even permanent — renunciation of an increase in the number of children in cases where circumstances require it, as when the health of the mother would be endangered by another pregnancy.

People concerned solely with a materialistic reckoning which they call "responsibility" regard children essentially as consumers and competitors in the area of consumer economics. They ask only "Can we prepare our children to be able to lead a comfortable and materially successful life?" Christian parents, however, know that their children are not born for this life alone but are reborn as children of God for the eternal banquet of love. Their question, then, framed before God in gratitude for all the gifts he has bestowed on them is, "How may we give back to the Lord all that he has given us? How many children can we raise for his family in such a way that they will become capable

citizens of this earth and effective members of the kingdom of God and heirs of eternal life?"

This is a fully aware and generously accepted parental responsibility, not at all confined to procreation but embracing and especially emphasizing the education of the children for both time and eternity. It includes the commitment of both parents to labor through patient years of sacrifice and prayer in order to raise their children for their destiny as children of God. In this comprehensive, affirmative attitude Christian couples reveal, not a lesser degree of awareness, reflection, and consciousness than that of their nonbelieving neighbors, but, often, a more sensitive appreciation of the scope of their vocation to parenthood, a greater generosity, and a deeper sense of responsibility.

In today's world, Christians cannot answer the materialistic view simply with the words, "We just take children as they come," which was at one time understood as a good expression of faithful trust in God's providence and of a grateful appreciation of the eternal worth of every child.

In our day Christian parents may have an even greater awareness of — and must have greater care for — the infinite worth of each child, which is threatened far more in our present pluralistic and rapidly changing society than it was in the protected and stable Christian environment of other times. Nor is their trust in God's providence less than that of former generations. But they see God's providence not only in those things which man cannot control or understand, but quite as clearly in what God, living and manifesting his will in history, allows man to know, interpret, and plan for himself. In other words, they see God's providence in the world he has given to them, and see their own responsibility as the task of fulfilling their human and Christian vocation within that given world.

The entire development of civilization and of mankind, together with the vast accumulation of medical and other scientific knowledge in our day, has brought about a different awareness regarding responsibility in the matter of procreation and education of children. For this reason the "take what comes" attitude, that once represented a humble

Whatever the circumstances, it can generally be said that truly responsible husbands and wives will desire for themselves whatever number of children — and however spaced — they can raise in human and Christian dignity.

and beautiful trust in God, could now represent, in some cases, the attitude of really irresponsible couples who do indeed “take children as they come” but do not bear the necessary responsibility for their upbringing.

For the Christian couple, then, parental responsibility means a sincere searching for the gracious will of God, and ready and grateful acceptance of that will. In this search and acceptance they will have none of the anxious fears held by those who are hemmed in by the narrowness of their own convenience or by shallow and transitory considerations. Neither will they feel a need to justify themselves in the face of a superficial living standard in their environment, nor in view of an unhealthy public opinion.

They will know that they are responsible to their marriage and to their life-giving function only in the eyes of their Creator and Savior, who has called them to a cooperation with his love. Thus they will make their decisions in mutual respect before him who gives life and preserves it and will make fruitful in a wonderful way the efforts of those who seek his will and serve it. But they will live and express it in a way that is a witness to faith and maturity.

#### RESPONSIBLE WAYS OF REGULATING FERTILITY

The Council Fathers, recognizing the serious practical difficulties that confront some married couples in “harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life” (*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Art. 51), specifically asked those “who are skilled in other than the sacred sciences, notably the medical, biological, social, and psychological,” to pool their efforts toward “explaining more thoroughly the various conditions favoring a proper regulation of births” (*Idem*, Art. 52).

After long study and prayer Pope Paul gave, on July 25, 1968, in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, his response to the anguishing question. His response followed more or less the report of a very small minority of his papal commission which had consisted of about seventy theologians and lay-people representing modern science and experience.

However, a few weeks later he prayed in a discourse given at the Bogata, Columbia, Eucharistic Congress: "May God grant that the discussions caused by my encyclical may lead us all to a better knowledge of His will". The declarations of many national hierarchies are a part of this on-going search for a better knowledge of God's will.

I have not in mind to explain here my own scientific approach to the whole problem as it grew out of years of dialogue and of study both of history and of the present needs and possibilities. What I try to explain is how married people can form their own consciences in view of the development already made evident by the progress which *Humanae Vitae* shows in comparison with *Casti Connubii*, and even more by the collegial effort of the whole body of the episcopate.

First of all, there must be absolute respect for existing life. This immediately and totally excludes the use of any drugs, techniques, or procedures that are probably or surely abortive.

Further, the Church has repeatedly and energetically condemned methods of birth control insofar as they appeared incompatible with the dignity and integrity of the conjugal relationship, for if this relationship is stripped of the spirit of mutual giving and debased to an egoistic satisfying of the senses, it inevitably turns into a system of mutual or one-sided sexual exploitation. In such an atmosphere it is impossible to grasp the idea of a noble and true fertility, aware of its responsibilities.

On the other hand, the Church has approved periodic continence, hoping it would be one relatively effective means of birth regulation. God in his wisdom has endowed woman with a fairly long period of infertility and a few days of possible fertility each month. Hence married couples are not acting arbitrarily if they take advantage of this special condition, so long as they do so in good conscience and in order to safeguard a harmonious conjugal love which alone can preserve in them a generous spirit of service of life. If there do not exist objective difficulties, married couples should follow this solution, as indicated, in *Humanae Vitae*.

But a great many couples — together with the bishops and experts in moral theology who must, on their part, bear the burden for married couples (compare Gal. 6:2) — find themselves confronted with difficult problems which arise from certain facts.

There are, to begin with, many couples who are too uninformed to know with certainty which days are infertile. And there are many others, particularly in the more unfortunate cases, for whom periodic continence is wholly unreliable, due to physical disorders which alter the natural pattern, or is inapplicable to their needs because of conditions in their lives, such as long absences of the husband away at work or in military service and only short reunions at perhaps inopportune times. For others the calculated use of the safe period may cause great tension and severe harm to their harmony or disturb their emotional balance. In other cases the periodic continence may greatly inhibit their spontaneity and even produce aggressiveness and hostility.

We know, of course, that there are some couples who can control their desires yet manage to express their love and affection in a thousand ways, doing their utmost to resolve their emotional problems through displays of tenderness while living through extended periods of continence. But total continence of long duration is often too much for a couple, endangering the harmony so necessary to them and their children, and exposing their home life to serious dangers, as Paul pointed out (1 Cor. 7:5). Moreover, this excessive constraint too often results in a lessening desire for more children.

Only a short time before his death, Pius XII took a stand against the use of the then newly discovered Enovid pill for the specific and sole purpose of regulating births. However, he left to medicine, to a certain degree, the responsibility of prescribing its use for other purposes. Since then moral theologians, although they felt honestly obliged to remain within the boundaries set by Pius XII, have reached an almost unanimous conclusion that hormone therapy with progesterone is permissible, provided that the result sought from a medical point of view is the normalization of the menstrual cycle or an equivalent good of human health.

"TO DO ONE'S BEST" DOES NOT, HOWEVER, MEAN TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE. GOD WILL, ACCORDING TO ONE'S OWN SINCERE CONVICTIONS, AND ACCORDING TO THE REAL POSSIBILITIES, IS THE THING WHICH THE CHURCH ALWAYS MUST ASK FOR.

The most common problem in birth regulation occurs in the matter of spacing births by avoiding pregnancy too soon after the birth of a child. Nature itself usually or often provides for such spacing in the case of mothers who regularly breast-feed their children, by bringing the ovaries to rest during the period of lactation. Thus it appears that the wisdom of the Creator has provided for a necessary interval between births to allow the rebuilding of the mother's strength.

But biological nature does not always function as it is expected. In many cases ovulation can still occur and often does during the lactation period, so that the possibility of fertilization is not excluded.

An increasing number of theologians have argued that, since the Creator has permitted this period of ovarian rest in so many other cases, it should be allowable to induce the same result through medication in those cases where "nature" fails to give it. Other theologians have disagreed with this opinion. But in the past years the problem is re-proposed on a much vaster scale. It is no longer just a question about the use of the "pill." In view of the new situation and the new advances in the fields of medicine and anthropology a re-examination of the central question is still going on.

Do tradition, Scripture, official pronouncements and scientific knowledge offer sufficient reasons for condemning the use of the "pill" and/or certain other artificial methods of protection against pregnancy, if this would allow conjugal love to attain its fullest expression at all times when the marriage partners' responsibilities to God and to others forbid them risking a new pregnancy?

Obviously, in the mind of the theologians and the more progressive hierarchies, the condition for this use is that the responsible generosity of the married couple in their service of life should never be excluded, and that they should restore to their union the full openness to procreation as soon as this can reasonably be done. Many bishops and theologians feel that, given this condition, one may not impose the heavy burden of long periods of continence upon married couples, threatening them otherwise with mortal sin, if one cannot prove that it is God Himself who wishes this. Others believe that suggestions of

this kind open the door to laxity, particularly since many couples are not sufficiently prepared to judge properly for themselves or to remain strictly within the boundaries foreseen by the theologians and bishops.

This is the situation one year after the publication of *Humanae Vitae*. The Church has to pray and search for a better knowledge of the situation of the married couples and of God's loving will for them. Meanwhile, mutual respect should prevail among those who tend in different directions, as well as respect for the married people who, in difficult situations where values and duties conflict, seek the best possible solution to preserve unity, stability and harmony in their marriages. Some declarations of episcopal conferences (particularly of the French bishops) stress this point of "conflict of duties". To my mind it is almost evident that in such conflicts, where under the given situation a pregnancy would be irresponsible, the duty to save the very existence of the marriage in its unity and fidelity prevails over the abstract principle that each individual conjugal act should be open for procreation.

## How Many Children?

*"Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted . . . With docile reverence toward God they will come to the right decision by common counsel and effort . . . The parents themselves should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God."*  
Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 50.

CHRISTIAN MORALITY is not a Procrustean bed.

In the fable of Procrustes, Greek mythology has given classic expression to the dangerous, indeed deadly, element contained in purely outward and quantitative conformity. This "hospitable" gentleman wanted to have as many guests as he could possibly house; but for all who came to him he had beds available of only one length. If a guest were too long, Procrustes shortened him by hacking off pieces of his head or feet and legs until the guest fitted exactly into the standardized bed. If a guest were too short, his limbs were stretched until he filled the bed.

Christian morality sees things differently. It knows that God calls every person by a unique name and that each response to that call must also be unique. Everyone receives his particular gifts and, contained within these, his particular mission. So, although Christian morality has some laws that hold true for everyone, these are not

CHRIST LOVES HIS  
PEOPLE AND  
SANCTIFIES THEM.

arbitrary laws that do not take into account the nature of man. They are, rather, expressions of man's innermost being and a protection of his dignity.

The laws of God show forth the inner destiny and the inner riches of human nature common to all mankind; over and above that, Christian moral teachings are primarily and essentially teachings of the gifts of grace. In the parable of the talents, the Lord illuminates this truth: "To whom much is given, from him also much shall be required."

Everyone who, through the gifts of God, is a healthy and normal person must one day be accountable to God if he does not observe the universal laws of his innermost being. But as to the manner and degree of achieving the great ideals toward which all disciples of Christ must work, the criterion is that "measure of gifts which Christ has granted to each according to his person."

The mind of the general public is often undiscerning; it sees people as objects, as numbers. Mass man — who himself is only a number — knows nothing of the infinite diversity and riches of personal existence. He takes the lowest common denominator for the norm and would impose this on everyone. It is in this spirit that it is so often said, "One or two children are all that can be reasonably managed in a family today."

Christian morality by no means says, "Every married couple must wish for five or seven or ten children." This again would be a false uniformity and contrary to true parental responsibility.

To the question, "How many children can a couple responsibly care for?" there is no single answer. No one formula applies to all. Not everyone has received equal talents from God. How many married couples must be gratefully aware, before God, of how richly he has blessed them with the gifts of a living faith, happy confidence, harmony, mutual and self-sacrificing love, and also the gifts of a home, health, daily work, the art of managing a home, and the ability to bring up children? In such grateful awareness they will see that these gifts, if they are used generously in God's service, will bring ever greater riches with them. Whoever is faithful in the matter of what he has been given is often rewarded even in this life.

Yet at times, even with all faithfulness, certain possibilities are limited. These limitations must be taken into account, in accordance with the thinking of Vatican II, in the matter of "transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted."

The parents' "own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which may be foreseen" must be measured especially from a spiritual perspective. Throughout history the world has been enriched by children of humble people whose bequest to them was joyful faith, love, and holiness rather than material possessions. Yet it must not be forgotten that material conditions, especially in today's world, can greatly affect the spiritual environment in which children are brought up. Despite heroic exceptions, it cannot reasonably be expected that even sincere faith and piety on the part of parents will ordinarily overcome for children the harmful effects of serious material, psychological, and spiritual deprivation.

A situation in which acute poverty requires both father and mother to work outside the home, while children remain unsupervised in a morally harmful environment, is surely one that limits the right to procreate more children while those circumstances last. Parental health, too, can be an important consideration, and not only because of the economic impact of the costs of medical care. Young parents in our present mobile society are often entirely alone in their responsibility, far from relatives who might care for the children during a mother's illness or who might help with support if a father is incapacitated. For the care of existing children, serious physical or mental illness often presents a circumstantial limitation to the procreation of more children at a particular time. The reasonable spacing of births generally becomes a matter of parental responsibility where the health of a mother, or the proper personal care of other small children in the family, require it.

Whatever the circumstances, it can generally be said that truly responsible husbands and wives will desire for themselves whatever number of children — and however spaced — they can raise in human and Christian dignity. In their judgment of what is reasonable, however, they will be guided, not by an unenlightened or selfish spirit of the

times, but by reason enlightened by joyful and trusting faith. In mutual deliberation and in view of all the relevant circumstances of their lives, they will try prayerfully to reach a suitable decision before God.

#### THEIR OWN DECISION

Vatican II made it clear that the married partners must themselves decide how many children they should desire. No one can take this decision from them, for only they know all the circumstances that must be weighed, in what measure, for their own spiritual good, the good of the children, and the good of the world at large. In making the judgment they must also listen to the Church which, with the good tidings of the loving will of God, can also help them to discern in which direction their true responsibility is to be found.

Frequently, after the third, second, or even first child, Christian married couples have to come to the conclusion, after serious consideration, that they cannot have any more children — at least for the time being. There may be a great variety of reasons why this is so. Some couples who, in spite of poor health and in spite of extremely difficult living conditions or unfavorable environments, have risked having one child or two children, may be practicing even greater heroism in the eyes of God than other fine couples who have gladly and responsibly raised eight or nine children under more favorable circumstances.

This is not to say, of course, that under the usual circumstances a one- or two-child family is the most favorable for the children's upbringing. Ordinarily a larger family gives each child greater opportunities to experience more love, more mutual giving, and more joy in close and loyal companionship, all of which help to develop a fully mature Christian personality.

History and our immediate experience show us that courageous Christian parents are usually capable of managing to bring up several children in spite of modest circumstances and that, in fact, they usually bring them up to be good Christian men and women. Moreover, we learn by faith that parents whose children may happen to be less gifted in health or abilities than some others, but who raise these children to become faithful Christians and mature persons, confidently trusting

...They learn again and again that the meaning of their sacred and sanctifying union is to transform every thing — their strivings and failures, their joys and discouragements — into a means of salvation.

in God, demonstrate more true responsibility than those who bring healthy and vigorous children into the world but allow them to grow up to be grasping or pleasure-seeking people, solely occupied with the things of a selfish world.

A true Christian will not allow himself to judge other couples or disapprove of them because they have few children. Who is to say whether such families might not have longed for more children? Who besides God and the couples themselves can say whether they had valid reasons for not having more children?

On the other hand the Christian will admire and recognize the courage of those married couples who, against the current of the times and in true freedom of spirit and reliance on God's goodness, accept many children from the hands of the Creator and raise them well. Likewise, the true Christian will take a stand against those who thoughtlessly or maliciously speak ill of those who have a large number of children.

#### THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SOCIETY

When we speak of true responsibility in the eyes of God, we must not forget that while each person is first accountable to God for his own actions and the talents that have been entrusted to him, his fellow human beings bear a joint responsibility with him. Today everyone is challenged to cooperate in bringing about a better general awareness of what responsible parenthood really is.

There should be intelligent recognition of the religious ideals by which married couples may judge how many children they should have in view of their responsibilities to God, to their children, to themselves, and to the society of which they form a part. Everyone can help to form healthy public opinions in the matter of God's wonderful gift of life, so that a false standard of materialism will not, in the case of weak couples, block the way toward responsibility in their vocation.

It is everyone's responsibility, in a democracy, to promote a social order that will encourage healthy and spiritually generous married couples to raise as many children as their circumstances and their spirit-

ual gifts will allow. The children of such parents will be sure to enrich the world.

Both sides of the coin must be seen, however, Vatican II says: "Within the limits of their own competence, government officials have rights and duties with respect to the population problems of their own nation, for instance, in the matter of social legislation as it affects families of migration to cities, of information relative to the condition and needs of the nation. . . . In view of the inalienable human right to marry and to beget children, the question of how many children should be born belongs to the honest judgment of parents. . . . Human beings should also be judiciously informed of scientific advances in the exploration of methods by which spouses can be helped in arranging the number of their children" (*Church in the Modern World*, Art. 87).

## *Sacramental Education*

*"With their parents leading the way by example and family prayers, children . . . will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation and holiness . . . Parents will energetically acquit themselves of a duty which devolves primarily on them, namely, education and especially religious education."*

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 48.

DUUE TO RADICAL CHANGES in social structures since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the family unit has handed over many of its functions to society at large. No longer is the family the chief unit of production as it was in an agricultural and craft society; the father is no longer the chief director of its economic destiny, or even the accepted educator in secular matters. This does not mean that the family's importance has diminished because of this re-distribution of functions. Instead, relieved of tasks that others can perform as well or better, the family should now become more clearly conscious of its deeper meaning and most important function, which is the formation of a community of love and holiness, radiating its goodness into the community — the whole environment — to sanctify the world.

Christian parents should be aware of the priorities in their children's lives from the very beginning. The baptism of their children

The Church is we ourselves joined in community, with all our weaknesses, imperfections, and limitations, but also with our human love for Him who has chosen us as the object of His divine, totally self-giving love.

makes husband and wife conscious of the most important aspect of their parental vocation, namely, that their love is to bear fruit not only for this earthly life but also for eternal life of infinite happiness. They have given to each other the most intimate pledge of their trust and their love, not only so that children may be born, but so that they may be *reborn* into divine life.

Normally, both parents, together with the relatives and if possible the parish community, ought to celebrate the great feast of their children's baptism. Even in the presence of the godparents the parents should be conscious of their role as chief witnesses in this great event. The baptismal ceremony should make them deeply aware that it is their greatest task to impart to their children the good tidings of all the wonderful things God has manifested to them in baptism.

#### EUCARISTIC TRAINING

Baptism directs us toward the eternal feast of love in heaven. In essence, therefore, it also directs us toward the Eucharist in which we celebrate the bond of love between Christ and his people "until the Lord return," which is until this bond acquires eternal fulfillment. In bringing the children to an awareness of baptism and its meaning, the parents have already begun the eucharistic training of the children which is the center and crown of parental religious education.

The preparation of children for their first eucharistic encounter with Christ in communion, and for their proper participation in the community celebration of the Mass, is a God-given joint task for father and mother and the entire family. Naturally this task will be carried out in cooperation with the pastor, whose role, however, is both complementary and subsidiary in nature. If the parents orient the entire upbringing of the child toward the eucharistic center of Christian life, then this will be effective in a quite different way than a routine four to eight weeks of instruction for first communion by the priest, no matter how thorough such instruction may be.

Much could be said about what preparation for the sacraments, and above all the Eucharist, could mean for the entire life of the children and parents. Through parental preparation, religion becomes

truly vital for the child, since it is anchored in his earliest and deepest experiences. Our intention here, however, is to consider the fulfillment of this parental right especially in the light of its meaning for the *married couple*.

When from the beginning a father and mother work together to prepare their children for the great day of first communion, integrating this preparation with the child's growth in understanding, they begin to realize the greatness of their own calling. They come to a deeper realization of what the sacrament of marriage means to them, namely that they and all the members of their family journey together on the road to salvation. The way they carry out their natural relationships will show their concern to fulfill their common vocation together. In their daily life, the family meal opens them to the new horizons of the heavenly meal.

They see that, in its finest manifestations, this mutual pastoral concern within the family is, as it were, a method of Christian training, a school of the lay apostolate wherein they are the witnesses of Christ's saving love for the world. The couple themselves, through their faithful attention to their children's religious education, become united ever more closely in a mutual concern to enrich their children's lives with the knowledge of Christ's love. By this effort they comprehend more directly the mystery of their own love and sacred solidarity.

#### PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

A part of eucharistic education is preparation for the sacrament of penance. If the parents actively undertake this task in cooperation with the priest, then from the very outset this not only can preserve the child from a harmful legalism, but the parents themselves can learn a greater spontaneity and honesty.

As the parents comprehend, along with their children just how their mutual relationship of trust is deepened whenever they admit to one another that they are not yet perfect but only on the way to perfection, then a similar thing happens within the whole family relationship. They learn humbly to confess their failures to one another and to guide one another to an ever more honest self-knowledge. And so

they grow more perfectly toward a real and lasting love for one another as well as for the ways of Christ.

#### CONFIRMATION

Before the child receives confirmation, he should have learned from his parents essentially what the grace and the mission of the sacrament of baptism is and how, through confirmation, the Lord continues to sanctify and to give new impetus to the joy and courage of Christian life through the Holy Spirit. Again, as in baptism, it is naturally understood that the parents will participate spiritually in this sacrament and have a true understanding of what is happening and of the responsibility that is theirs. For even more than the ordained priest, and together with him, it is their special task to raise their children in a wise and mature obedience to the inward guidance that comes through the Holy Spirit.

People who think only in terms of worldly provision for their children may say, "One can't give children enough these days if there are more than one or two." Actually, couples without faith and love can scarcely undertake responsibility for even one child. But those parents who have prepared their children for each step in their sacramental life, who have imparted an ever deepening love of the Eucharist, know that regardless of what they may be able to offer their children in a material way, their richest gift to them is faith and eternal life, boundless love and happiness.

The shining eyes of the children who have received these gifts confirm this knowledge. In this light all the rest receives its fuller meaning.

## *Our Divorced Brothers and Sisters*

*"God does not impose impossible things, but by manifesting his command, he urges you to do what you can and to pray for what you can not yet do; by doing so you fulfill the will of God."*

Augustine, On Nature and Grace, Ch. 43.

WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY there needs to be and must be a deeper and more charitable recognition of the plight of the divorced person, without at the same time any kind of approval of infidelity and divorce followed by remarriage.

In the United States alone the number of divorced persons runs into millions. Who can guess at the enormous amount of suffering among those involved, their children, their relatives? Many may have been grievously guilty in the matter of their divorce; others, divorced against their will or out of extreme necessity to protect themselves and their children, may be innocent victims of tragic situations.

We would be unjust and would doubly sin against the admonition of the Lord, "Judge not" (Matt. 7:1), if we did not acknowledge that the blame for many of these separations does not lie entirely with the divorced persons. Our society, of which we ourselves are a part and sometimes a poisoning part, fails to appreciate and to emphasize

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY CAN BE REGARDED  
AS A REFLECTION OF THE TRUE LOVE OF GOD.

the sacred values and responsibilities of marriage; it must share the blame and the guilt. Have we ourselves been unfailingly credible witnesses to the holiness of marriage? Have we formed and maintained in our own families a community of love that shows in our own surroundings the sanctifying power of the marriage sacrament?

The laxity of divorce practices and the fact of divorce legislation that in many countries is anything but a reasonable protection of marriage must also bear some of the blame. Added to this is a public opinion that tends to regard divorce as the normal way out, given the slightest difficulties. All too often a situation that need be only temporary and unimportant, one where an encouraging talk could help remove tensions and improve attitudes, is brought to a crisis by the ruinous advice, "Why don't you get a divorce? You don't have to take that."

It is this casual view of marriage and divorce that explains the mentality we too often encounter among people today. They say, "We are marrying on the condition that one possibility remains open: that of saying *goodbye* to each other if we don't get along together. Why should we feel tied if another partner would bring us more fulfillment and better satisfy our affections?" Under the plea of not risking disenchantment, they create at the outset all the conditions of failure. They set sail without any intention of following the rules of navigation, binding themselves to a partner without subjecting themselves to the liberating "law" of integral fidelity.

Church law recognizes certain reasons for innocent spouses temporarily to suspend living with their marriage partners, or perhaps even to separate forever. But surely Christian married couples must remember that Christ — who was sinless as we are not — forgave unto death. They should not stand merely on legal rights and reject a spouse forever because of one serious lapse, even in adultery. "Innocent" wives or husbands should perhaps ask contritely whether they have been partly or even chiefly to blame for the other's sin and whether they can offer their partner a more sincere and healing love.

Still, there are cases, such as of dangerous abuse or the refusal of a partner to give up an adulterous relationship, in which the continua-

tion of married life is simply an unreasonable demand. Even then, the Christian spouse should ordinarily seek a kind of separation that leaves open an avenue of hope rather than a divorce. However, in many cases, it may be almost impossible for an innocent spouse to protect his essential rights and those of the children against the arbitrariness of the partner, without obtaining a legal divorce.

#### A CONTINUING BOND

From the standpoint of Christian conscience it is crucial to realize and to acknowledge that a legal divorce by no means justifies, before God, entering into a new marriage. "What God has joined together let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). The sacred relationship established by the sacrament of marriage continues to exist; the couple still stand in a redemptive relationship toward each other.

Loyalty to the ideal vision of marriage is admittedly difficult and obscured following the collapse and severance of a union. Yet the unjustly abandoned partner finds in this very drama — as does the guilty partner who is repentant — the opportunity to bear testimony in a sincere, effective, and worthy manner, to conjugal faithfulness and to its irrevocable obligations.

It is not, then, simply a matter of arriving at a just solution of affairs in a reasonable and objective manner when a separation takes place. Both partners must also ask themselves how they can be of help to one another on the way to salvation, through a kindly attitude of forgiveness, by self-sacrifice and prayer, and if possible, by resumption of their married life together. It is not unusual for a heart, though cooled, to regain its original warmth thanks to the *others's* love, and the thread of faithfulness to be resumed. But even should reconciliation be refused to the resolutely faithful partner who desires it, the fact remains that his example brings a heartening light into this darkened world.

If the separated persons honestly try to live according to the principles of the Gospel and if, by sacrifice and renunciation, they acknowledge the indissoluble nature of sacramental marriage, then they are

giving meaningful witness to the Christian faith and for this reason are worthy of all respect. It could be added that those divorced people who conduct themselves in this manner, living without recrimination or bitterness, usually do win the sincere respect and acceptance of their communities. What Paul said concerning widowhood: "Honor widows that are widows indeed" (1 Timothy, 5:1) should properly be applied to those numerous courageous Christians who, as divorced persons, are outstanding examples of forgiveness, responsible and solicitous raising of children, and of marital fidelity that endures heroically despite the tragedy of rejection and separation.

Those who are divorced are, as such, subject to no ecclesiastical penalties: they are not excluded from the sacraments. However if they know themselves guilty before God, then of course the normal way to the Eucharist is the sacrament of penance. A spouse who, before the civil law, is innocent, should examine his conscience seriously before God, whether he has not to take a part of the responsibility on himself.

If we want the divorced parents to live a celibate life they must be helped by all who can do something, by their family, by their friends and by the Christian community. Especially their nearest of kin must ask themselves in an attitude of solicitous and respectful love, "What can we do under the given circumstances to help him (or her) through this difficult time?"

#### REMARRIAGE OF DIVORCED PERSONS

Only if we take with absolute seriousness the command of fidelity and of reconciliation can we reasonably raise the question whether divorced persons must, under all conditions, remain unmarried. The situation of millions of divorced people who feel that their personal integrity is in greater jeopardy if they have to live in forced celibacy rather than in a second, civil marriage, imposes questions which the theologian would rather like to avoid. These questions also have an effect on the ecumenical dialogue.

The teaching and discipline of the Roman Catholic Church is clear and firm on this point: the divorced person, whether guilty or

...Each partner must also discover himself, and constantly assess what he contributes to or takes away from the unifying power of the conjugal relationship.

innocently divorced, cannot remarry if the previous marriage was a valid sacramental marriage, as long as the other spouse lives. The way to remarriage is open only if the previous marriage is declared canonically invalid (null), or if a dispensation has been obtained from a marriage contracted with a non-baptized person, or from a non-consummated marriage.

However, not all aspects of this discipline and doctrine are irrefutable. The unchangeable part of the doctrine seems to be the following: (1) A sacramental marriage is by its nature indissoluble; that is, the spouses and the Church have no right whatsoever to dissolve a marriage which is still an existing vital reality, or which, through reconciliation, can be brought to life again. (2) The mere fact of an act of adultery does not dissolve a marriage and is not a valid reason for dissolving it.

The Oriental Churches seem to accept these fundamental principles although their practice in some localities may contradict them. But while underlining that man — including the Church — cannot separate or dissolve what God has joined, they ask another kind of question. In our Latin mentality, we assert that after a total destruction of the reality of marriage the contract still binds and may not be dissolved; the Orientals, on the other hand, look to the existence of a marriage as a sign and reality. Their old tradition can be summarized in this way: besides the physical death mental, civil and moral death can also dissolve a marriage reality.

*Mental death* means that the spouse has totally and hopelessly lost the use of intelligence and freedom.

*Civil death* is asserted if the spouse is declared dead by the civil authority or if he is justly condemned to a life-long imprisonment.

*Moral death* of a marriage for the Orientals means a situation where, through constant infidelity and after all efforts of reconciliation, the lived sign and the reality of the marriage is thoroughly and hopelessly destroyed (dissolved).

In the case of moral death, the Oriental tradition still strongly recommends celibacy for the kingdom of God. But if the abandoned

spouse feels in conscience that in his situation it is better for himself and others to remarry than "to burn" and to deteriorate morally, then the orthodox tradition tolerates or explicitly allows a new marriage.

Until the 12th century a similar tolerance was not totally excluded in the western (Latin) Church. The Council of Trent, however, endorsed the doctrine and practice that did not tolerate a remarriage even after the total destruction of reality and hope of the first marriage. But the Council of Trent tried to formulate the doctrine in a way that would not be a dogmatic condemnation of the old tradition of the Orthodox Churches of the Orient.

In the past few years a number of Catholic bishops and theologians have asked for a reconsideration, chiefly in view of the new sociological situation in which the abandoned spouse finds himself often exposed to terrible frustrations and other dangers. Biblical scholars are not of one mind about whether the practice of the Orthodox Churches contradicts the Bible or not. I do not dare to predict what might be the outcome of these studies and discussions, but it is clear that they cannot remain hidden from the average Catholic.

While I think that the Catholic should still feel obliged to follow the actual — although probably not infallible — doctrine of the Church, I suggest that many divorced persons who find themselves unable to live a celibate life, are entering a new marriage with a more or less sincere conviction that by doing so they do not lose the friendship of God. The priest and fellow-believers may try to dissuade them if this seems to have a real chance, but they should also respect a sincere conviction.

Others may have remarried with a feeling of guilt, but have gradually come to the conviction that God does not impose on them the necessity of breaking up a stable and loving bond. They repent about the past step and ask sincerely what can now be the will of God for them.

A change of heart does not mean under all circumstances a return to the first and rightful spouse. This is sometimes impossible. It may be that the raising of children, or the care of the second partner in sickness or other need, imposes the necessity of continuing to live

together. If, then, they try to live together in conjugal chastity and restraint, considering themselves as spouses — or in some cases as brother and sister — and also admit to those who know of their situation that they have erred, then the Church must honor such a humble avowal.

These spouses who seek sincerely the will of God as now possible, while acknowledging that the divine law of indissolubility of valid marriages imposes the high ideal of fidelity, may be in their own way, truly on the road to salvation.

If they admit their past errors to those friends and neighbors who are aware of their status, if they advise others against taking the same step, then to some extent they are doing a public penance. They are honoring God and making up for the offense they have given Him. Their witness lends a special forcefulness to the ongoing battle so necessary to counter a wrong public opinion that accepts divorce too easily. And if they persevere in this witness of faith and humility, and do whatever they are now able to do, then they must not doubt that they are, after all, living as Christians, under God's mercy.

Needless to say, divorced persons who have cut themselves off from the sacraments by their remarriages are in great need of the help of their fellow Christians, especially those who are close to them. Parents, for example, should not reject a daughter or son who marries again after the failure of her first marriage. Certainly it will be painful for them that all of their good persuasion has been in vain. But we must write off no one. If we do, in contrast to the mercy shown in the Gospel, then perhaps we too somehow share the blame whenever divorced people quarrel with the Church and stir up public opinion against it and against the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage.

Christ preaches both fidelity and mercy as commands of his covenant with his people. He has proclaimed peace to all men of good will, especially to those in the most frustrating situations. What he asks for is not a perfect solution of the external situation but good will. "God does not impose impossible things, but by manifesting his command he urges you to do what you can and to pray for what you can not yet

do; by doing so you fulfill the will of God" (Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, Ch. 43, 50).

The poor man who fell into the hands of robbers was saved when he was brought to the inn by the merciful Samaritan, though he still needed a long period of care. We cannot gain the heights of justice as rapidly as we can fall into sin. God knows the heart of man. Where there is really humility and good will, man can be sure of God's peace. (With respect to the reception of the Sacraments see my book *Shalom — Peace*. Farrel, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1969.)

## *Mixed Marriages*

*“Catholics must joyfully acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ.”*

Decree on Ecumenism, Art. 4.

ROMANO GUARDINI once said with great urgency in a lecture: "If you are offered very simple solutions for the difficult problems of life, do not hold them for one moment in your hands! Throw them out of the window; they are too dangerous!" This advice holds true for those problems designated by the label "mixed marriage."

We are already on the wrong track if we think that the term "mixed marriage" is unambiguous. We oversimplify, and improperly so, if we concentrate our efforts on mere prohibition of mixed marriage. Our first interest here, then, is to speak a helpful word to those living in a mixed marriage. Then follows not a simple warning against any kind of mixed marriage but a word on how to discern a responsible decision from a choice which betrays the conscience of one partner or the other, or of both.

Marital love is the source of generous, responsible parenthood and of marital chastity, which means tender, faithful love, profound respect for the marriage partner, and reverence for the mystery, gift and purpose of marriage.

Canon law distinguishes between two typical kinds of cases:

1. Marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic Christian.
2. Marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person.

The marriage law itself demonstrates, through its various classifications, the great difference between these two forms of mixed marriage. Moral theology, which deals directly with moral situations and the ability of the conscience to make distinctions, must, however, take into consideration many other differences.

3. No doubt an important question for us is: what kind of a Catholic is involved? Is he well-instructed in his faith and does he live it happily? Does he know how to combine firmness of principle in his faith with a deep respect for the sanctity of conscience of his partner? Or is he a Catholic who has little to show beyond a baptismal certificate? Is he superficial, even frivolous, in religious matters? Is he full of complexes, torn by doubts concerning his faith, or filled with resentment toward his Church?

Viewed in this way, it already becomes clear that, from the moral standpoint, even a marriage between two people commonly designated as Catholics can be a real and even extremely serious case of "mixed marriage." Furthermore, it could even be irresponsible for a believing, devout, and thoroughly upright Protestant Christian to enter into a mixed marriage with a Catholic who may be lacking religious substance of any kind, since the Protestant's own piety, faith, and moral seriousness could be ultimately undermined by such a "Catholic."

The marriage of a believing and practicing Catholic with a person holding communism not only as an economic-political system but as a philosophy of life or professing any other form of atheism, is a mixed marriage in the fullest (moral) sense of the word, even if the latter is baptized in the Catholic Church and perhaps even continues to support his Church financially.

4. Non-Catholics cannot be reduced to a common denominator any more than those who are called Catholics.

On the one side are Christians, strong and happy in their faith, who belong to vital Orthodox or Protestant congregations; their lives

as Christians stem not so much from what has separated Orthodox or Protestant Christians from us, but from the word of God. Their communities are active in the ecumenical movement. They pray and do all they can for the reunion of Christendom; they are respectful of the convictions of others.

There are non-Catholics who not only personally think in almost all matters as do the best Catholics, but also belong to Church congregations which lack hardly anything except external union with the Roman Church. And there are still other respectful, devout, and deeply-religious non-Catholic Christians to whom nothing seems more foreign than protesting against the Catholic Church: people who have only one thing in mind, namely, to remain faithful to the Gospel and therefore to reject anything in any Christian congregation that is foreign to the Gospel.

5. Along with such Christians there are also lukewarm, superficial, frivolous, even fanatical Christians of other sects. Religious superficiality can be combined with contempt and hatred of the Catholic Church, and behind such feelings there stands perhaps a congregation or sect which continues to aggravate such attitudes. There are also those narrow-minded "protestors" who are Protestants sociologically speaking, but are not at all familiar with the best elements in evangelical devotion, deny the basic truths of their faith, tolerate any deviation from their creed, and find it unforgivable when anyone becomes a Catholic or even so much as admits to a truth regarded as typically Catholic.

6. Among the "Catholics," as among the "evangelicals" there are those who are actually not on any side. They are boundlessly "tolerant," telling themselves that "after all, it does not really matter what one believes," because they basically consider religion to be no more than a matter of feeling or of irresponsible choice.

#### CAN MIXED MARRIAGE BE RISKED?

Whoever has learned to make distinctions can see the prudence of the principle laid down centuries ago by a plenary council of the

ancient Church (Laodicea, probably in 372 A.D.), to the effect that a mixed marriage cannot be entered upon "without discernment." Since the distinctions not only effect the individual persons but are also grounded in historical contexts, one can also understand the historical changes in the legislation of the Church and in the development of practical moral rules of behavior.

For example, in the middle of the third century, during a time of violent persecution, when any mixed marriage might expose Christians to the danger of betrayal of their "underground" community, North African bishops sharply repudiated any marriage with pagans. A century and a half later, Augustine could calmly distinguish between irresponsible and therefore unallowable mixed marriages and allowable ones. With the great power of attraction at that time of a Church outwardly free, certain mixed marriages became for many right-minded pagans an outward form of grace, a path toward faith.

During the era, many centuries later, of completely separated and mutually hostile Catholic and Protestant communities, the general prohibition against a mixed marriage was a normal measure of self-protection; nor was this prohibition felt to be burdensome, apart from a few exceptional cases, in an age of closed societies, since it was not usual for one to marry outside of his religious group.

Today the situation has greatly changed. We are living in an open and mobile society, and at the same time a powerful trend toward Christian unity has made its appearance. On the one hand we see this movement, and on the other we see both a rise of new sects and different forms of atheism and secularism — while among Church members there is a degree of silent departure from Christian belief. The time has come when Christians must once again use the power of discernment, just as they did during the second half of the fourth century.

The mixed marriage is not an ideal, any more than a divided Christendom is, even though in the latter case a more hopeful dialogue is taking place. Today all men of good will and wisdom feel doubly grieved when certain Christians, and even entire communions, fanatically oppose efforts toward reunification. Thus it is a matter of absolute

prudence that a believing Catholic cannot responsibly enter into a mixed marriage with a non-Catholic or non-Christian who despises his religious convictions and is active in a communion which will have nothing to do with the matter of unity in belief or dialogue carried on in mutual respect and love.

A mixed marriage should be rejected from the outset if one partner would try to induce the other to act against his conscience. This is especially dangerous since marriage, in its essence, is both a communion of love and salvation. How can a Christian hope to make his conjugal love an experience of a fully humane and redeeming love if the other is not only indifferent to but even hostile toward his honest judgment of conscience? One cannot betray his own conscience for the love of another, for it would be impossible for the other to love honorably and respectfully one who is not honest with God, with himself, and with his neighbor in the most crucial matters of life.

It would be completely unacceptable for a Catholic to impose on his future marriage partner the condition of becoming a Catholic prior to their marriage, even if the partner were honestly willing to consent to a Catholic marriage and Catholic upbringing of the children. An unwilling or even half-willing consent to change one's religion is worth nothing. An open and honest mixed marriage is better than one in which one partner cannot be happy in his conscience over the step that he has taken.

The present movement toward Christian union forbids especially those mixed marriages which may reasonably be expected to increase the tensions between the various confessions, for nothing today should be closer to the hearts of all of us than a speedy reunion of Christianity. Until that day comes, there should be at least a respectful and loving relationship among the Churches of Christ. We all have a great obligation to pray that the Church may find the canonical rule for mixed marriages which, in the present situation, will best express her fidelity to the faith and to the command of the Lord, "That all may be one." The present legislation cannot be the last word.

#### AFTER THE MIXED MARRIAGE

Whenever the Church warns against entering upon mixed marriages "without discernment," whenever she must clearly state that entering into a mixed marriage under certain negative circumstances is simply not a responsible decision, this surely does not mean that a mixed marriage already existing is to be subjected to reproach by others. Unfortunately, relatives and acquaintances on both sides occasionally sin in this regard, since they do not see the different values in different situations.

Once a mixed marriage has been entered into, then there can be only one further concern for the married couple and for their true friends: to preserve the marriage courageously and patiently, and to make the best of it. Any further "ifs, ands or buts" are simply a flight from reality.

If a mistake has been made or a sin committed, then one must ask for God's forgiveness and then thankfully make the best of the mixed marriage in view of God's compassionate love. Others must not heartlessly judge the situation, even when it is obvious that the venture has not been at all, or even partly, successful.

All of us live on the mercy of God. The beatitudes say of the merciful and the peacemakers: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy," and "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:7 ff.). Repeated blame or self-reproach does not make for that radiant joy, born of faith, or for that love which endures all and hopes all.

It would be naive to invite people to enter into mixed marriages as a service to the cause of Christian reunification, but it would be almost equally naive not to remember that those people who, in their marriage, have had to share the suffering of a divided Christianity, are waiting to be shown positive ways in which they might possibly serve the great cause of unity.

The respectful and honorable dialogue which the Christian communions are holding with each other today should find its echo in the family. We have learned that respect for the conscience of the other

person must not normally take the form of retreat into stony silence. In the good mixed marriage one will give honest witness to his personal conviction as well as respect for the conscience of the other, while both are ready to learn from each other as the Churches learn from each other.

Mutual love and respect in the family can foster a fruitful discussion as to what can be done to serve the reunification of Christendom, or at least to increase mutual respect and cooperation among Christians. More and more the discovery is being made that the path toward greater religious depth, toward absolute candor with regard to the call of grace, is the only path that will lead us forward. There are mixed marriages in which this path has been happily taken. There are, however, many other situations. In some it will be best to remain silent on religious matters until a better time comes.

#### PEACE TO ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL

The following letter, which a priest might have written to his sister involved in a difficult mixed marriage, will give a practical example of how the priest, as a representative of the Church, is a brother in a very special way to every believer suffering pangs of conscience. Furthermore it should become evident that an endangered mixed marriage is not to be regarded simply as one case among many which can be handled with a kind of moral slide rule. We are always dealing with human beings and individual situations. And only if one's heart goes out to all who suffer can one find that solution which comes as close as possible to the spirit of the Gospel.

This letter was first published long before the Council. It brought many letters of gratitude, letters of encouragement from bishops, and also vehement reproach from one bishop and a number of conservative canonists and priests. I reproduce it here, as I think the same attitude can be even more helpful under the more lenient approach of the Church of today. Could a similar approach help with divorced people who live in a canonically invalid marriage?

"Dear Sister. Your words are not without bitterness when you write me, 'You priests should now show us a practical way to live in a mixed marriage instead of one-sidedly condemning the step we took. But the step has been taken. Doesn't the sacrament of mercy still exist for us? If so, then there should be an end to reproaches!'

"Please believe me when I say that I understand your feeling. There have indeed been many times when we have unintentionally hurt you and many other men and women who live in mixed marriages. Whenever we have seriously spoken to young people in a sermon and have cautioned them about entering into a mixed marriage without due consideration, we were probably not sufficiently mindful of the fact that you two would naturally be listening to all of that, and that, after all you have been through together, you would naturally be sensitive about it.

"Apparently we do not always succeed in making clear whom we are addressing in our remarks. You surely do not hold it against us that we caution people at all, but when, in so doing, we do not carefully distinguish and thus give the impression that one mixed marriage is the same as any other — then you feel yourself singled out and judged anew.

"Also, something else you reproached me with made me stop to reflect: 'Don't you priests usually say that God can also turn past mistakes and sins to good account and that he gives everyone his grace when they do as well as they can? Are we supposed to be the only exception to this?'

"No, that principle holds true for everyone. Whoever really does what he can do and above all prays with perseverance for what he cannot yet do, is on the way of peace and will not be abandoned by God. Nor does the Church, who, after all, is the servant of God's mercy, reject anyone of good will.

"But just how do things stand in your case?

"Your marriage with Martin bore all the signs of a responsible mixed marriage. Martin is a fine man, devout and conscientious.

*...They should fill the earth  
with love and with an off-spring  
which is loved and able to  
reciprocate love.*

**IT IS NOT A MATTER  
OF NUMBERS.**

tious. Even now I am still convinced that none of the young men who were baptized as Catholics and who showed an interest in you could compare with him in character. You courageously and tactfully saw to it that the stipulations of the Church were carried out. And Martin did, finally, agree to everything. But it did not escape either you or your family how difficult this was for him, in spite of his great love for you.

“Certainly everything could have gone well. That this was not the case is not the fault of Martin, whom I respect as highly as ever. The Catholic priest who officiated at your wedding did not strike the correct note. He should have known that when you came to see him it was no longer relevant to warn you so strongly about entering into a mixed marriage. I am sure that many other priests would have used the opportunity in an especially kindly manner to point out the meaning of Christian marriage and to give you good advice and encouragement for any future difficulties.

“In spite of his unchanging Protestant position, Martin has an alert appreciation of a beautiful and liturgical ceremony. He had, after all, hoped his yielding in the matter of bringing up the children would at least be acknowledged with a properly beautiful form of Church wedding ceremony. Again you were both unfortunate in this. You both felt repelled by the frosty manner of your pastor.

“Then, on top of this, came the counter-blow. Martin’s minister invariable said on his visits, which you always have feared, ‘A free Protestant Christian is not subject to the canon law of the Roman Church. Your children should not be subject to that law but should be free.’ This meant that Martin should not feel obliged to keep his promise.

“It is not your fault that you were not sufficiently prepared to give a convincing answer to that, although it would be easy to distinguish between the abiding laws of God and the sometimes outdated regulations of canon law. The Catholic education of your children is not just a matter of canon law, it is a matter of your own conviction.

"For Martin it was a matter of conscience whether he could promise and keep what he promised. The complexity of the whole problem did not make it easy for Martin, either, to see clearly. He was, of course, not familiar with our faith or the meaning of the Church laws. Given his sensitive nature it was a bitter blow to him to have saddened and angered his good mother, a very strict Protestant.

"When you were carrying your first child, your great joy at the prospect of becoming a mother was diminished by another dark cloud on the horizon. Your mother-in-law cautiously took her stand: "If it is a boy, shouldn't he be baptized in the religion of his father?" Mention had been made of this prior to the engagement, and through a well-meant silence you had unintentionally created a false impression.

"Since the first child was a girl, things were all right once again. Then came your two sons. Martin felt he had to yield to the pleas of his mother, and they were baptized Protestant, against your will. Perhaps in so doing, Martin felt your pain more deeply than you felt his when, before the marriage, he had finally submitted in the matter of the children. Nor were you able to sense his pain about this so easily at the time, for the joys of being in love helped him over many an obstacle.

"For fourteen years, ever since the Protestant baptism of your second child, you have not received the sacraments of the Church. But you have prayed and kept the desire for the sacraments alive within you. In my last letter I finally ventured to invite you to the sacraments. And now you write me, 'But I am excommunicated!' If you had undertaken to have a Protestant marriage or if you yourself, in defiant disobedience to the Church, had caused your children to be deprived of a Catholic education, after baptism outside the Catholic church, then to be sure you would have been excluded from the Sacraments until such time as you would have ceased your defiance and intended to make all *possible* amends for your mistake.

"Once more I sincerely extend this invitation: Consider yourself to be a faithful daughter of the holy Church! Do not seal yourself off from the consolation of the sacraments! Only if you are truly happy in your faith can you awaken sympathy for the Catholic faith in the hearts of your fine husband and your dear children.

"But right now do not go to your pastor to confession. Rather, go to a place of pilgrimage or somewhere else where you will surely find a kindly father confessor. You will surely be absolved if, overcoming your understandable bitterness, you go to confession filled with good will. You may also go to holy communion there.

"When you have once again achieved inward peace, then go to your pastor. Describe your situation to him or take this letter with you and let him read it. We hope he will heal your wounds with oil, not vinegar. But you must also try to understand him. For many years he has been on the defensive against mixed marriages, which are so often sick marriages from the beginning, whether from the fact that the conscience of one partner or the other has been obviously violated, or because conscience played no role at all and the religious questions have been simply thrust into the background. If there is mutual understanding, your pastor will surely encourage you on your difficult way and will help to strengthen your joy. Perhaps your confessor or spiritual advisor will tell you that you ought to try to bring your sons back to the true Church and true faith. Tell him calmly that you have already done much in this regard and on occasion have perhaps done too much.

"Perhaps, driven by a false sense of guilt, you have occasionally tried to force this issue. That will not work. You may continue to wish, as before, that your husband and children will have the complete happiness of the Catholic faith. Give a good example in all things. Help your husband and children toward prayer of a more personal kind. When they, in their own way, become more devout, happier and firmer in faith, they will come — even if unconsciously — closer to the fullness of faith, taught by the Catholic Church, or at least toward that respect for our Church which is a characteristic sign of the ecumenism of today.

EVERY SACRAMENT MAKES POSSIBLE  
A PERSONAL MEETING WITH CHRIST.

"In its essence the mixed marriage is just as much a sacred partnership as is the purely Catholic marriage. Even in your painful situation you can both help each other on the road to salvation. You may certainly take example from the piety of your Protestant husband. In many things you could meet him half way without any worry. For instance, he is fond of praying at the close of the Our Father, "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever." He does not understand why you don't pray that part along with him. In fact you could well do so, for it is one of the oldest Catholic prayers, attested to as early as the first century. Would it not be well if occasionally you would seek advice in such matters from a broad-minded, devout priest or layman?"

"Perhaps you finally will say to me: "But all this sounds quite different from so many sermons on mixed marriage." That may be. But consider: I have not been speaking to you here about mixed marriages in general. Each marriage has its own character, and what I have said here is meant for you personally, for your marriage. Besides the unalterable basic principles, and the need of change in legislation, there are also quite personal things, things that can be uniquely felt and expressed only in a personal conversation such as we have in our letters. None of the basic principles are thereby forgotten."

The Catholic Church is about to change her legislation on mixed marriages. She will still have to go a long way. There is nothing arbitrary about this. The old legislation was made under quite different situations. With the development of ecumenism and the growth of the faithful in maturity, there will be less emphasis on legal regulations. This should not lessen, but rather strengthen, attention to the moral and religious obligations. The Church can make many concessions as to the form of the celebration of the marriage, but she can never declare that education of the children in the Catholic faith is merely optional. This is an obligation that arises from faith and gratitude for its gift. We must do our best in order to obtain a fully Catholic education for the children.

"To do one's best" does not, however, mean to do the impossible. Good will, according to one's own sincere convictions, and according to the real possibilities, is the thing which the Church always must ask for.

GOD IS LOVE

## *Widows and Widowers*

*"Widowhood, accepted bravely as a continuation of the marriage vocation, will be esteemed by all."*  
Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, Art. 48.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST lies across the patiently borne sorrow of widows and widowers, but their hearts treasure the hope of the resurrection, the joy of the sacrament of marriage, and the honor of a fidelity that lasts beyond the grave.

Theirs is a transfigured sorrow in comparison to the bitter woe of the divorced person whose separation has come about through rejection by the once-loved spouse. The widowed have known love and faithfulness "until death did them part," and have experienced intimately the blessings that came to them through married love. Now, in the pain of separation by death, they realize in a new way all that their marriage has meant.

They remember how their mutual love became more and more purified as they learned together to renounce self-seeking, and how this love brought them an ever-deepening happiness as life went on. Now, even in their grief, they sense that the fatal illness and death of their partner in marriage has brought about the final purification of their

LOVE DETERMINES THE HEALTH  
AND SUCCESS OF MARRIAGE, OF  
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DAILY LIFE.

love. And remembering Christ's promise that "who abides in love abides in me and I in him", they know that their spouse is close to God because in life he gave generously of his love and gratefully received it.

Painfully as they miss the physical presence of their partner, they realize that from the very beginning their mutual affection was more than a physical relationship. Together they moved along the path toward God, their love firmly rooted in him. For them their devotion was always a new point of departure to God, a foretaste of the even greater joy of his holy and faithful love. And now they know that such a love, fixed in God, does not see death.

#### LOVE DOES NOT DIE

Holy Scripture gives clear advice to widows. In the first epistle to the Corinthians (7:39 ff.) Paul writes, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband be dead she is at liberty to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abides."

The sacrament of marriage, as a grace-giving form of participation in the bond of love between Christ and his people, is a participation whose symbol is transitory. The fact that death dissolves the indissoluble bond to the extent that the remaining partner can validly remarry, makes us realize that marriage is only a temporal image of the new and everlasting Covenant. The Christian does not look upon marriage as the final event but as the road toward the kingdom of everlasting love.

Yet in marriage the eternal is already humbly present in a conjugal affection that reflects Christ's undying love. The widowed person who has had a vital and happy experience of this redemptive love in marriage, can draw strength from it to renounce voluntarily any new marriage if circumstances do not warrant it.

A great theologian of the second century, Clement of Alexandria, wrote that widows are becoming to a certain extent, a new virgin to the extent that their love for Christ is undivided and undistracted.

They are this, however, in their own way: in conscious affirmation of their marital experience. Having given and received in marriage a devotion that reflects and signifies Christ's undying love, their memory of the marriage and all its spiritual heritage live on, giving direction to their love of God in a way especially suited to them.

They do not indulge in self-pitying mourning. Rather, in gratitude for the blessings they have received through marriage and out of respect for all that married love has accomplished in them, they look for new ways to serve God with the talents of heart and mind that have developed through the years of their conjugal life. The fruitfulness of their marriage is thus continued in loving service to family, to neighbor, to Church, and to community.

#### WIDOWHOOD OR REMARRIAGE

A voluntarily maintained widowhood is clearly very close to virginity "for the sake of the Lord," which the Council of Trent called "the more blessed way." But the celibate state can be chosen only if the person is filled with love of Christ and if the conditions of life allow it in a fully humane way.

Since the time of the Apostles the Church has held the widowed state in high esteem. Admission to the ecclesiastical status of widowhood, which was given special distinction by the Church, required a definite standard of character: "if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work" (1 Tim. 5:5-10).

Holy Scripture and the history of the Church tell of many admirable widows, such as Judith, Anna the prophetess who was permitted to witness the presentation of the infant Christ in the temple, Monica the mother of the great Augustine, Elizabeth of Thuringia, Bridget of Sweden. All through the ages there have been such widows who have given outstanding service to God and to mankind.

But Scripture also mentions the needs and perils of widowhood. Especially those who are widowed young, who have not had the good

fortune in their short-lived marriage to experience the full growth of the ties of love, perhaps have no children, and find little support and help from their relatives: these may have great difficulty understanding and accepting their lot, and may not be able to face this situation alone. Are they sufficiently strengthened by the spiritual help of those closest to them, and of the priest? Those, too, who are left with small children and often faced with problems and responsibilities that are especially hard to meet in the widowed state. Hence, those who do not feel called upon to remain alone should consider the possibility of remarriage.

Even if their love for the first spouse makes it seem doubtful that they might marry again, nevertheless in concrete situations it could be the right decision for many reasons. This is the clearly stated view of Paul. Today when, in contrast to earlier times, widowed people are far removed from their family of origin and without the emotional support and practical help that was available in the more static, family-oriented society of former times, the idea of remarriage has to be more seriously considered.

#### HELP FROM THOSE CLOSEST

Those who are widowed need the help of their families, friends, and parish associates in making the many adjustments that confront them in their changed circumstances. Such a time of grief and bewilderment presents trials on all levels, spiritual, emotional, practical. Spiritual understanding must be deepened, loneliness fought, discouragement overcome, various decisions made. Perhaps a home must be relocated, a job found, new provisions made for children's care. In all these things family and friends can and should give assistance through encouragement, companionship, and practical help.

Those courageous widows and widowers who are untiring in the care of their children, and in blameless widowhood give such a fine example of fidelity, patience, and courage, deserve more than merely the silent respect of others. They also earn the right to be honored by those closest to them and by society.

To the extent that widowed people are shown consideration and sincere respect within their environment, they will more easily bear their lot and more fully realize the deeper meaning of their destiny through the trusting acceptance of God's will.

## *Destiny Can be Shaped*

*“Redeeming the present time, and distinguishing eternal realities from their changing expressions, Christians should actively promote the values of marriage and the family, both by the example of their own lives and by cooperation with other men of good will.”*  
Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Art. 52.

**M**AN IS AN HISTORICAL BEING. He is profoundly influenced by events that preceded him and that shaped the material and spiritual heritage of past centuries. These past events gave form to his way of living, his milieu, and to the economic, social, and cultural structures among which he spends his life — all this even before he was in a position to decide upon his own place in it. In turn, he himself influences this temporal and cultural heritage in his own time, thus shaping the history that will come after him.

Man cannot truly understand himself and his destiny except in the perspective of this interaction with the world around him. He cannot hear his personal call from God except through the voices of his time: the voices of his family, his neighbors, his community, the whole environment in which he lives.

The same is true of marriage and family. The married couple cannot see their vocation in its full scope and magnificence unless

MARRIED CHRISTIANS SHARE IN  
THIS MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE  
THROUGH THEIR MUTUAL LOVE  
WHICH IS PATIENT, ENDURING,  
COMPASSIONATE, YET FILLED  
WITH THE ARDOR OF HOPE  
AND FAITH.

they look beyond their own persons and concerns, even beyond their personal salvation, and see themselves in relation to the whole of life, to the ongoing history of salvation. If their marriage is to be, as Christian marriage should be, a witness to love, loyalty, and courage in the presence of the world and for the sake of the world, then the couple and their family must involve themselves in the concrete history of their times which they will have a share in determining.

Every marriage affects its environment and is itself affected, either for better or for worse, by the milieu in which it is lived. Actual living conditions, economic, political, and social realities — the “stuff of life” — impose certain restrictions on marital and family life. Pressures from outside constantly influence each of the spouses and, in consequence, the marriage relationship itself. This means that the whole world around us must be taken seriously.

#### A CHRISTIAN OUTLOOK TO THE ENVIRONMENT

When we speak of “world,” we must think of it as God’s good creation, given to man to administer for the glory of God and the salvation of men. But in it, not only Christ and his followers but the forces of evil as well, have made “investments” of the spirit. Here the battle takes place for man’s ultimate destiny, between the sons of light and the powers of darkness. As disciples of Christ, Christians have no choice but to act in this struggle. Either we bring salvation to the world or we ourselves succumb passively to the powers of wickedness operating in the environment.

The approach of the Christian couple and their family to the world around it should be one of gratitude for all that is implied by the gift of life in the world. This appreciation urges upon them a sense of responsibility toward the social and cultural life of their environment. Their commitment is far from being only a matter of disinterested gratitude. It represents also a legitimate interest for the welfare of the family itself, since society influences the family at least as profoundly as the family influences society.

In the stable Christian life of an earlier time, the outward success of a marriage — especially in the matter of faithfulness to the other

partner and the basic responsibilities of family life — was to a great extent an achievement of the clan and the community. In a uniform culture the responsibilities and options of living were clearly defined, even rigidly staked out, and both custom and self-interest required that they be respected.

Today the situation is different. Marriage is endangered by social pressures and images that come from a host of different philosophies and crowd in on married couples in a thousand forms, from the slogans and cliches that fill the airwaves, up to (or down to) the example of film stars who, childless and radiantly "innocent," try their luck in successive but unsuccessful marriages.

#### DISCERNMENT AND INVOLVEMENT

This new condition brings to today's married couple an increase in both responsibilities and choices. It requires that consciences be more sensitive and better informed than ever before. Above all it requires discernment. The couple themselves and each member of their family must learn to recognize and to encourage everything that is good and just and helpful in their environment, whether it comes by way of neighbors, the communication media, governmental agencies, cultural associations, civil or social groups, or through various aspects and movements of the Church. And they will reject all that is shoddy or harmful in any of these.

Such action requires involvement. It is the responsibility of Christian couples to participate in all the forces that shape the milieu in which they and their children live, and which in turn shape their own physical, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. For their own good, and for the good of their children who must live tomorrow in the world that is being shaped today, they must *act* in the world around them, energetically cooperating with all those other men of good will who take seriously their full human responsibility.

Through family-and-neighbor relationships, through parish and community work, through participation in civic affairs on all levels of government and in international government, parents must share to the

extent of their individual capacities in the formation of public opinions and attitudes. In this way they will contribute to the building of a society that encourages the best conditions for that healthy marital and family life which is the root of all sound societies.

With the disappearance of the restraints imposed by earlier cultures, young married people today must realize that the success of their marriage depends far more than formerly upon their own deliberate and persevering efforts. It has become much more a matter of mutual and familial achievement. This achievement can only be theirs if they develop a clear image of what constitutes a real success in a home, a marriage, and a family, and are prepared to pursue their Christian ideal and witness to it in a world that has largely lost sight of it.

#### THE WORLD BELONGS TO WHOEVER OFFERS IT THE GREATER HOPE

Christians would make a dangerous mistake, however, if they spent their energies bemoaning the perversity of the world around them. Those whose vision is lighted by faith know that they are living in a time of salvation, and that this time is favorable for them from the moment they receive their call from God and respond to it in a spirit of concern for the others and their conditions of life.

Only the optimist can change the course of history. Life is hopeless only for those who do not understand the "signs of the times" or who miss the actual possibilities of the present through their own apathy. To be an optimist, however, does not mean to comfort one's self with illusions. It means that one has an acute sense of existing possibilities — of their limits, difficulties, and risks.

Everything depends upon how one sees things. A person may see and accept first the shadows and evils, and claim not to see the area of light around them; or he may habitually discover divine powers at work, and do this in a spirit of joy and with a sense of salvation. In other words, he discovers all the good in the world that reveals the benefits of creation and redemption.

There are, both within and outside the Church, theologians and laymen who, despite all the great things achieved or courageously begun by the Second Vatican Council, cannot find words enough to

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bewail and mourn over human weaknesses or other failings that came to light during the Council's sessions and in the years after the Council. Only grudgingly will they admit that *any* actual progress has been made. People like that will never make the wheels of history turn, whether in the Church, in society, or in the formation of homes and families.

The Christian who views his marriage with the realistic optimism of faith never focuses his attention for long on minute details of prohibitions or imposed regulations. What concerns him is the total image, the greatness of his mission. He knows that the sacrament of marriage means an exultant sharing in the fulness of salvation which, with Christ, penetrates the whole world. In this perspective he judges the blessings and special tasks, the limitations and potentials of his personal vocation.

Those marriage partners who build their shared life on a foundation of the faith do not refuse to see their own faults, weaknesses, family duties, the handicap of their physical or mental heredity, or the modesty of their means. But their faith, their love, their patience fills everything with a renewing spirit of hope. They develop an inner core of faith, courage, endurance, and a capacity to recover from wounds. They become grateful for all the help and beauty which contemporary culture and civilization provides for them, and for the depth of goodness that they see in the people with whom they come in contact.

#### CHRISTIAN REALISM

It is their discernment of this good and this beauty that helps them to move on towards the realization of their ideal. In this sphere they slowly but surely shape their destiny. For real life is not a flight into a dream world but a constant recognition of the human condition as it really is here and now.

The Christian family has its own eternally trustworthy guiding star in the law of God, taught through the Church, but this law must never be confused with formulas and customs of other ages. When Christ assumed our bodily form, he entered mankind's history, accepting the fate and the burden of his human brothers in his own time,

to give us all a new sense of solidarity and a new direction. He prepared the victory of divine love in the very midst of human history.

Today his disciples likewise become a part of their times and of their milieu. The true Christian mobilizes his faith and his receptiveness to discover all that is wholesome and fruitful in this nuclear age in which we live. The light of his faith, combined with the flame of love, shows him in his own surroundings all those positive elements to which the darker areas will gradually have to yield.

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